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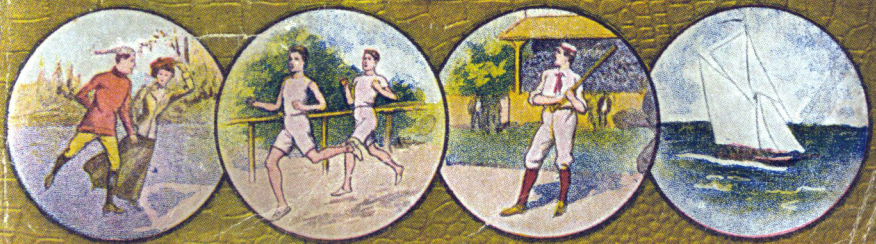
Frank Merriwell's Mascot

BY Burt L. Standish



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Frank Merriwell's Mascot

OR

INZA'S PERIL

BY

BURT L. STANDISH

AUTHOR OF

"The Merriwell Stories"

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Frank Merriwell's Mascot.

CHAPTER I.

THE BROTHERS, ROLAND AND OLIVER.

Roland Packard sat alone in the little back room at Jackson's. He was smoking a black brierwood pipe with an amber mouthpiece, while before him on the round table over which many reckless students had gambled, drank, and quarreled, was a bottle of whisky and an empty glass. That Packard had been drinking was told by his flushed face and bloodshotten eyes.

Packard was thinking, and the scowl he wore plainly revealed that his thoughts were not of a pleasant nature. Now and then he smote the table with his clenched fist. Sometimes his lips curled back from his white teeth, as a tiger might expose its fangs. At length, after glancing again and again toward the door that led into the barroom of the saloon, he snarled:

"Well, why the deuce doesn't the fellow come! I'm getting tired of waiting! When a man makes an appointment with me, I like to have him prompt. I fancy I'll get out of here and let him go to the dogs."

He pushed back from the table, as if meaning to leave

at once. Almost as quickly, he seemed to change his mind, for he turned out another drink, muttering:

"I'll wait a little longer. He said he would put me onto a sure way of disgracing Frank Merriwell—of making him a criminal. Something must have delayed him, but I am sure he will come."

There was a step outside, and the door suddenly opened. Packard opened his mouth to greet the newcomer, but sat silent and startled, his lips parted, staring at his brother, who looked so much like him that only their most intimate friends could tell them apart.

"Oliver?" he exclaimed, as if doubting his eyes.

"Yes," said the other, stepping in and closing the door, against which he leaned. For some moments the brothers stared at each other in silence. At last Roland cried:

"Well, what the deuce are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?" Oliver questioned in return. "For one thing, it is plain that you are getting drunk."

At these blunt words, Roland's face seemed to flush still more hotly, and he scowled blackly.

"What if I am? I have a right to take a drink occasionally!"

"Occasionally—perhaps; but of late you take a drink frequently. In short, Roll, you are becoming a tippler."

"Oh, come off! Why don't you study for the ministry, instead of medicine? You've taken to preaching on any and all occasions of late. How did you happen to come here?"

"I was looking for you."

"Why?"

"Because something told me you needed my company."

"Then something told you wrong!" snapped Roland. "I prefer to be alone!"

"Come, Roll," said Oliver softly, "I know something is the matter with you, else you wouldn't be here in this low joint drinking whisky by yourself. You are my brother, and I want you to come away from this place with me. It is here more students have been led to ruin than anywhere else in New Haven. All the associations and influences of this place are evil, and——"

"Oh, cheese it, Oll!" exclaimed Roland wearily. "You make me tired! Preaching again! I hate preaching! I detest preachers! If this place is so bad, why did you step into it?"

"Because I felt that I might find here my brother, whom I love. Because I had no fear that the place would contanimate me. Because I saw a duty, and I hesitated not to do it, no matter where it led me."

"Duty! Bah! You are growing sickening, Oll! Come have a drink with me."

"No! You know I have quit the stuff!"

"All right. Then here's to you, Oll; may you become a good, old, hard-shell Baptist."

He lifted the glass, but, with a quick stride, his brother checked the movement by dropping a hand on his arm.

"Stop, Roll! You have taken enough of that stuff!

Don't drink any more. Put it down and come away with me."

Shifting the glass to his other hand, Roland flung off his brother's grasp, snarling:

"Get out! Don't interfere with me! You're not my keeper! I'll do as I like! I'm in a bad temper, and I need something to cheer me up."

"But liquor never cheers you; it puts you in a worse temper. I don't understand why you drink it."

"Perhaps I have a reason for wishing to be in a bad temper," sneered Roland, as he suddenly lifted the glass and drained it to the last drop.

There was a look of sorrow on Oliver Packard's face, and, contrasting the brothers at that moment, an acute observer might have discovered a strong difference between them. Although, in general contour, their faces and figures were greatly alike, Roland lacked a certain delicacy that marked his brother. He was cast in a coarser mold, though of a somewhat masterful and determined disposition. He had not the strength of character that had been given to Oliver, and he was one who would give himself over to evil passions and the dictates of his ungovernable temper. Still, in moments of restraint and soberness, he could so deport himself that he might be taken as the milder and more affable of the two. In this respect he was vastly deceptive, and not a little of Roland's ill-doing in the past had been blamed on Oliver by those who found it difficult to distinguish between them.

Oliver loved his brother, and he was willing to do al-

most anything for him. It was his conviction that Roland had a wonderful intellect, and would, if not led astray, become a man of great importance and prominence in the world. For this reason, as well as for his natural brotherly love, Oliver did everything in his power to restrain the evil inclinations of his brother; and more than once he had been able to prevent Roland from accomplishing designs of a black and repellent nature, for which he had been thanked not at all by the baffled one.

This night Oliver had felt that something ill was in the air, having detected his brother musing with a flushed and exultant face over a note he had received, and having heard Roland mutter:

"I'll be there—oh, I'll be there! Am I ready to help do the trick? Well, you may bet your sweet life I am!"

When Oliver stepped forward and asked what sort of a trick he was muttering about, Roland quickly put the sheet of paper in his pocket, answering sullenly that it was "nobody's business."

Then Oliver had sought in vain to reason with his brother, but Roland had sneered at "preaching," and flung himself angrily out of the room.

In regret and sorrow, Oliver let him go for the time, but restlessness had come upon him at last, and he had started out to hunt for the wayward one. He had succeeded in tracking him to Jackson's resort, a place frequented by sporting men, pugilists, and students who chose such company. Oliver shook his head sadly as he saw his brother dash off that drink of fiery liquor.

"Roland," he said, his voice sad and choked, "it is plain you are on the road to the dogs."

"Oh, you've told me before that I'm going to the everlasting bow-wows!"

"Yes, and I tell you so again. I have tried to show you the folly of your ways."

"Talk through your nose, Oll; it will sound more ministerial."

"But I fear my words are wasted."

"At least, your fears are well-founded."

"You persist in choosing for associates such men as may be found in this place, which is a disgrace to New Haven!"

"You should join the crusade against the New Haven drinking-places for students."

"I believe the success of that crusade would be a blessing to the town and to Yale College!" cried Oliver earnestly.

"Bah!" retorted Roland. "If men want to drink, they will find places to do it, for all of your crusades and reforms."

"No matter how true that may be, if some of the vile places in this town were cleaned out, there would not be so many lured to ruin."

"I suppose you would shut up Morey's and Traeger's?"

"No; you know I am not a crank, Roll. We were together in Maine last summer, old fellow, and saw there a sample of the working of arbitrary prohibition laws."

Roland laughed coarsely, and smote the table with his fist, causing the glass to dance and the bottle rattle.

"By George!" he cried; "I never drank such vile stuff in all my life as I found in Maine! It was awful!"

"And still men drink it."

"Drink it? Great Scott! I should say so! I saw more drunken men on one holiday in Maine than I ever saw before in all my life! If I had not seen it with my own eyes, I would not believe such a state of affairs could exist in a strictly prohibition State."

"Truly the prohibition laws of Maine—as enforced—are a farce," nodded Oliver; "but——"

"A farce!" laughed Roland, apparently glad to divert the conversation. "The greatest farce ever known—an imposition on unsophisticated people who believe they are doing right by sustaining the state of affairs existing. If it were possible to enforce the law, it might do some good; but the shame of it is that the law is made to be read, and not to be enforced. Politicians tell the reformers they will give them all the laws they want, and they do; but those laws are never enforced to the letter, and cannot be, because the higher officials are corrupt, and the honest workers are not supported. That being the case, Oll, old man, let's take a drink and be thankful that we are in a State where we can get something better than the man-killing fire-water ladled out to the thirsty in prohibition Maine."

"I did not come here to drink, nor to discuss the temperance question," said Oliver, refusing his brother's invitation. "You have expressed your opinion; but it is the opinion of a man who drinks, and, therefore, of little value. Don't take any more to-night, Roll!"

"It's an honest opinion, and not that of a hypocritical pretended teetotaler!" warmly asserted Roland, as he dashed off another drink. "You came here to preach to me, and I've given you a lecture on prohibition. Ha! ha!"

"Well, let's talk this over on the way to our rooms. Come on, brother."

He tried to induce Roland to leave the place, but was laughed at for his pains.

"I'm very comfortable here," said the liquor-flushed fellow, "and as long as you stay and slobber over me I shall stay and drink. So, if you want me to get out of here, I advise you to skip and leave me to myself."

Oliver hesitated, knowing how obstinate his brother could be. There was an expression of trouble and sorrow on his face, but Roland sneered at it. For a moment Oliver was tempted to try to compel his brother to leave the place, but, remembering what a furious creature Roland could be when under the influence of drink, he did not venture to make the effort.

"Very well," he said, sadly shaking his head, "I have done my duty."

"All of that, parson," laughed Roland. "You can do no more. Leave the rest in the hands of One who is wiser."

"Don't, Roll—don't be blasphemous! You are bad enough without falling into such mockery!"

"And you are enough to drive a man to anything. Get out! Leave me alone!"

"Won't you come with me?"

"No!"

"Please!"

"No!"

Oliver turned away, but paused with his hand on the door.

"Roland," he said earnestly, "if you are contemplating any wrong-doing, I beg of you to beware! Once I saved you and another from being concerned in a deed that might have lodged you both in prison, and now——"

"To blazes with your cant and meddling!" snarled Roland, his fingers gripping the glass on the table. "Had you not interfered, I might not be here to-night!"

Oliver started.

"What? Then you confess that you came here to plot against Frank Merriwell, a fellow who never harmed you in the world? Oh, Roll, I had hoped——"

"I don't care what you hoped!" Roland almost screamed. "It's none of your business why I'm here! Not another word! If you open your mouth again——"

He lifted the glass.

Oliver realized that he had failed completely thus far, but he firmly declared:

"All right! Once I saved you despite yourself, and I'll save you again! It is my duty to you as a brother, and I shall do it! You will not succeed."

As the door closed behind him, the glass went whistling from Roland's hand and crashed to a million pieces against the panels.

CHAPTER II.

A PRECIOUS PAIR.

"Furies!" snarled Roland Packard, glaring at the door that had closed behind his brother's retreating form. "He is altogether too nosey! He makes me sick! In his way, he's all right, but he's got to learn not to interfere with my affairs. Where the blazes is Agnew?"

For some time he sat there after the departure of his brother, muttering, scowling, grinding his teeth, working himself into a rage. At last, he sprang up, crying:

"Well, I've spent time enough here! I'll demand an explanation of Agnew. What in blazes does he mean by making such an appointment and failing to keep it!"

But as he stepped toward the door it was thrust open once more, and Donald Pike entered the little room. Pike closed the door and shot the bolt behind him; his face was pale and his manner agitated. Packard stood beside the table, staring at Pike in astonishment. These two were not the best of friends, although they had been brought together by their mutual hatred for Frank Merriwell.

"Hello!" growled Roland. "What the dickens do you mean by bolting that door?"

"Sh!" hissed Pike, holding up a trembling hand and leaning toward the door, his attitude being one of listening. Roland was greatly mystified, and not particularly pleased.

"Oh, what ails you?" demanded Packard angrily. "You act as if you had stolen something!"

Pike started violently.

"Keep still!" he panted.

"Why should I keep still? What's the matter with you?"

The agitated student did not answer this question at once, but, after a time, he stepped from the door, saying:

"Let's sit down and talk it over."

"Talk what over?" asked Packard suspiciously.

"You know, the little business Mort wrote you about."

"Mort? Who——"

"Agnew—Mort Agnew."

"Oh!" said Roland, on his guard. "I didn't know whom you meant. What sort of business is it to which you refer?"

"You know well enough," said Donald.

"I know nothing about it!" snarled Packard.

"Agnew——"

"Sent me a note to meet him here an hour ago. Why the dickens he has not kept the appointment is what I do not understand! I am a man who always keeps appointments, and I don't like to be trifled with by others."

"Waiting has put you into a bad temper, man," said Pike. "Agnew could not come, and——"

"Why not?"

"Well, he has a fancy that he is watched pretty close."

"Watched?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"A private detective."

"Why?" asked Packard, puzzled. "I don't understand."

"I suppose not."

"Then why in blazes don't you explain?" almost shouted Roland. "I'm sick of this beating about the bush!"

Pike held up a hand.

"Don't lift your voice like that, man!" he nervously said. "Somebody might hear you."

"Well, what do I care if somebody does! I'm not a criminal, and I have no dealings with criminals."

Pike straightened stiffly against the door, looking hard at the medical student, who finally demanded:

"Well, why do you stare at me like that, man?"

"I was trying to make out just what you meant by your speech," said Donald slowly.

"Are you that touchy? I didn't suppose you would cringe, for I'm sure I never took you for a criminal."

"Thanks," said the other, dryly—"thanks awfully! Before we proceed further it is best that we understand each other thoroughly."

"Before we proceed! I have nothing to do with you. I came here to meet Morton Agnew."

"And Morton Agnew, finding he was shadowed by a detective, sent me here to meet you. If I find you all right, we are to settle a little matter of business referring to a fellow whose initials spell Frank Merriwell."

For all that he had been drinking freely, Packard's

brain was not greatly befogged, and Pike had made himself clear. This being the case, Roland quickly asked:

"What in blazes is in the wind? Agnew's note was very mysterious."

"The door is locked," said Pike. "Let's sit down and talk it over."

So they sat down at the table.

"I'll ring," said Packard, "and have some glasses brought. My nosey brother dropped in here, and I broke the only glass I had flinging it at his head."

"Your brother?" said Pike. "He is not like you—rather a soft sort of fellow?"

"Soft?" said Roland, scowling, which Pike did not heed.

"Yes—rather sappy, you know. He hasn't much backbone. I take him to be a dish-watery chump."

Roland leaned across the table and clutched the wrist of the other, his face black as a thunder-cloud.

"Look here," he snarled, "I'll thank you to choose your words about my brother! He's a man! There is nothing of the chump about him! If you were half the man he is, you'd be lucky! If you open your face about him again, you'll regret it!"

Astounded and bewildered, Pike muttered:

"Why, I thought you regarded him as soft and sloppy! I've heard you call him worse names than I applied to him."

"That's all right; I'll call him what I like, but I'll punch anybody else who makes talk about him, and don't

you forget it! He's my brother; I have a right to talk about him. He's nothing to you; so shut up!"

"All right," quickly said Donald, wishing to soothe the anger of his companion. "I didn't know—I didn't mean to offend. Do you mind telling why he was here?"

"He came here to look for me."

"And, having found you——"

"He tried to induce me to leave this dive with him. He did his best to get me away, but I declined to go. That's all."

There was a moment of silence, and then Pike awkwardly said:

"Well, I'm glad you didn't go, for I'd not found you here. Now we are here, we can soon come to an understanding."

"But one thing puzzles me right along," muttered Packard. "I never knew Agnew to hesitate to go anywhere he liked, and I confess I'm still puzzled to know why he did not come to me here."

"I told you about the detective. You have heard of Selton Dirk, the fellow who found the missing Dutch boy for Frank Merriwell?"

"Of course; the papers had the story. Merriwell made a chump of Police Captain Gregg, who has had it in for him since then."

"I know," nodded Pike. "That's what's going to be the ruin of Merriwell. He has the police down on him."

"I'm still befogged. What has all this to do with us?"

"Lots."

"And Agnew—how does it bring him in?"

"You see, Gregg's brother-in-law, a fighter by name of Hank Kiljoy, had some trouble with Merriwell's friends Dunnerwurst and Gallup, on the steamer that was bringing them all here from New York. This Gallup has remarkable strength, for all that he looks so raw and green, and he shook the stuffing out of Kiljoy, who immediately swore vengeance. Later, the Dutchman disappeared, and Kiljoy swore out a warrant against Gallup, on which the hayseed was arrested. Then Frank Merriwell went at the matter in earnest, employing Selton Dirk, the private detective. Dirk straightened matters out in a hurry by tracing and discovering the Dutchman, who had been flung from the steamer by Hank Kiljoy himself, but was picked up by a schooner manned by a drunken crew. On the day that Gallup was to be remanded for trial, Dirk produced the Dutchman in court, and Gallup was set free at once. But that was not the worst for Gregg. A warrant had been sworn out against Kiljoy, charging him with attempted murder, and he was forced to fly for it. Of course, the fellow's sister, the wife of Police Captain Gregg, has demanded that Merriwell be punished, and so the great Yale favorite has the police against him. Have you followed me?"

"Sure," nodded Packard; "but still it is not clear where Agnew comes in. Have a drink?"

"No."

"Oh, come!"

"No."

"Then here's looking at you."

Roland tipped the bottle and drank directly from it.

"Go on," he said, after having lowered the bottle and caught his breath. "Why is it that Merriwell's detective is shadowing Agnew?"

"Don't be in such a hurry; I'll come to that pretty soon. Gregg means business; he has sworn to drive Merriwell out of New Haven or lodge him behind bars. Now, Gregg is a man who will stop at nothing to gain his ends. He has made this clear to Agnew, and Mort has a scheme whereby Merriwell may be branded with crime and disgraced forever. How does that please you?"

Packard's eyes were gleaming with an evil light, and he panted:

"That's all right! It would be the greatest joy of my life to put such a stigma on Merriwell!"

"I thought so," nodded Donald, with satisfaction. "You like him in the same way that I like him."

"I have dreamed of murdering him!" whispered Roland, his face hot and burning red.

"That's beyond the limit," said Pike; "but you can help do him up just the same."

"How?"

"Can I trust you fully?"

"Yes."

"Will you swear on no condition to go back on me?"

"I will swear it!"

"You know there was a little party at the home of Fairfax Lee last evening?"

"Yes, I've heard about it."

"A selected company of Yale men attended."

"Yes."

"Frank Merriwell was there."

"Of course; he cuts lots of ice with the Lees."

"So was Morton Agnew."

"How did he get an invitation?"

"He worked it so that he got there."

"Well, it seems to me that you are getting off the track."

"I'm not, as I'll show you in a moment. Last night a diamond brooch worth at least ten thousand dollars was stolen from the home of Mr. Fairfax Lee."

Packard uttered an exclamation and started up.

"Sit down," said Pike quietly. "I'm coming to the point in a hurry."

"But there was nothing about this robbery in the papers."

"No; it has been kept quiet."

"Why was that?"

"Well, it is possible Mr. Lee thought he might recover the brooch more readily. The police have been notified of the loss, and they are working on the case. Frank Merriwell, as a particular friend of the Lee family, knows all about it, and he is working on the case."

"But how the devil does it happen that you know so much about it?" asked Roland wonderingly.

"I obtained my information from Agnew."

"Well, I think it rather remarkable that he knows so much."

"He was present at the party."

"But he is not a particular friend of the Lee family."

"No."

"Then explain it, man!"

"I'll come to that right away," smiled Pike evilly. "Agnew believes Merriwell put this private detective, Dirk, after him."

"Then Merriwell must suspect that Agnew knows something about the robbery?"

"It looks that way from the road. This explains why Agnew preferred to lay low to-day and not meet you here, as appointed."

"I'm much obliged to him," said Packard, with a deep breath. "If he's being shadowed by Selton Dirk, I don't care to be seen in his company. That fellow Dirk is bad medicine."

"Agnew sent me," Pike went on, "and I am to see if we can't come to an understanding. You are ready to do almost anything to put Frank Merriwell in a box, and I am here to show you how you can down him for all time. You will not take a chance, for the police, headed by Gregg, will complete the work after you have done your part."

"What is expected of me?" asked Roland.

"You will attend the basket-ball game to-night—the game between the two picked teams, one headed by Buck Badger and the other by Frank Merriwell."

"Of course, I expect to attend."

"There you will get your opportunity. I am to give you something which you are to place in a pocket of Merriwell's street clothes, which will hang in his dress-

ing-room while he is engaged in the game. That object will be found in Merriwell's pocket when he is arrested, which will happen before he leaves the floor, and it will cause the ruin and disgrace of Frank Merriwell. Police Captain Gregg knows all about the plot, and will not make the arrest till he is given the signal that the trap is set. Thus, in this, you will be working in conjunction with the police, and there is no real danger."

Roland's brain was not quite clear, but he hoarsely asked:

"What is this thing that is to be found in Merriwell's clothing?"

"This!" answered Pike, taking from his pocket a plush case and touching a spring that caused it to fly open.

Packard uttered a suppressed exclamation of admiration, for his eyes were dazzled by the flashing beauty of the marvelously handsome diamond brooch that lay exposed to his gaze!

CHAPTER III.

THE PLOT.

Roland Packard stared and stared, his liquor-flushed face growing pale. At last he muttered:

"Is—is it—the—the brooch?"

"Yes," nodded Pike, speaking in a low tone, "it is the brooch that was stolen from the home of the Honorable Fairfax Lee last night.

"But how the dickens comes it in your hands?" asked the befogged medical student. "You did not attend the party."

"No; but Agnew did."

"Ha!"

"Now you see—now you understand?"

"Gods of war! Has Agnew turned thief?"

"You don't seem to understand," said Pike impatiently.

"Hanged if I do!"

"Agnew is not a regular thief."

"And yet he—he stole—that?"

"He saw an opportunity to get in some fine work, and he grasped it."

"What sort of fine work?"

"Agnew did not swipe this brooch for the brooch."

"No? Then why——"

"He had an idea. Frank Merriwell was there. Merriwell is held in high esteem by the Lees."

"But what has that to do with the theft of the brooch?"

"Merriwell calls there frequently," Pike went on. "It was not certain the brooch would be missed at once."

"But it was?"

"Yes. All the same, Agnew will be able to carry out his plan and put the shame on Merriwell—if you will help."

Packard reached a hand for the bottle and took a swallow from it to steady his nerves.

"Now clear this matter up," he directed. "I am ready to do almost anything to knife Merriwell, but I decline to be in any way concerned in a diamond robbery. It strikes me that Agnew has taken long chances, and he may trip up."

"Hang it all!" snapped Donald. "Don't you understand that he stands in with the police?"

"But this private detective, Dirk—what about him? You say he has spotted Agnew."

"And for that reason Agnew resolved to lay low and send me to you. Dirk has no pull with the police. In fact, the police hate him because he has beaten them several times, and they would be glad to throw him down. Agnew believes that Merriwell put that fellow on his trail. Police Captain Gregg is shadowing Merriwell, or has a man doing so. You see how the land lays?"

"Not quite. I thought policemen were bound to arrest criminals and protect the innocent."

"Bah! It seems to me, Packard, that you know little about policemen in general. They have their interests, and they do not bother themselves to protect the inno-

cent. In many cases, they stand in with crooks. In this case, Gregg is bound to square the score with Merriwell, and he doesn't care a rap how he brings it about. Agnew has put the whole plan before Gregg, and the gallant captain has agreed to do his part."

"What is his part?"

"Arrest Frank Merriwell!"

"For what?"

"Stealing this brooch!"

Packard pursed his lips and tried to whistle his surprise, but simply blew out a hissing breath.

"Is that it?"

"Sure thing," nodded Pike exultantly. "Great, isn't it?"

"Well, it's rather stunning," admitted Roland. "But I don't see how——"

"That's what I'm to explain."

"All right; go ahead and make it clear, old man. How is this crime to be fastened on Merriwell?"

"You are to help. You can do it."

"I'm listening."

"To-night, while the basket-ball game is taking place, you are to slip into Merriwell's dressing-room and conceal this brooch about his clothes."

"Great Scott! I begin to see!"

"Of course you do! I will be watching. When you appear in the rink with this bit of crimson ribbon knotted in your buttonhole right there, I'll know the trap is set."

Pike displayed the ribbon, thrusting it over to Packard.

"Then what?" huskily asked Roland.

"I'll give the signal to Captain Gregg, and he'll arrest Merriwell at once. A search will be made, and the stolen brooch will be found hidden on Merriwell's clothes. See? That means that Frank Merriwell gets it in the neck. What do you think of it, Packard, old fel?"

"The plan is all right, but one thing I do not understand."

"What?"

"Why don't *you* put the brooch on Merriwell's clothes?"

"Because I am to give the signal to Gregg. Because I have been seen with Agnew since the robbery. Because I must be able to show that I was not in the vicinity of Merriwell's dressing-rooms. Because the connection will be broken entirely when you do the job. Not even Police Captain Gregg will know who placed the brooch where it is to be found. He will know nothing save that I give him a signal that the trap is set."

Packard was silent, studying the face of his companion.

"Come," cried Pike impatiently, "what do you say? It takes some nerve to do this trick, but it means the everlasting disgrace of the fellow we hate. Have you the nerve?"

"I rather think so!" growled Roland hotly. "But there seems to be too many in this game, and I don't like it for that reason. I do not know much about you, Pike, but I do know that Agnew has been detected more than once in his tricks. You say you were seen with Agnew. What if you were shadowed after you left him? What

if you were traced to me? What if I should be placed under surveillance and traced to the rink?"

"I have taken every pains to make sure I was not shadowed. For that reason I was late in getting here. You may depend on it that the connection is broken. When you leave this place with that brooch, there will not be another person save ourselves in all New Haven who can swear just who has it. It is now growing dark. Two hours from now the game of basket-ball will begin. Shortly after that the brooch will be found on Merriwell's clothes, and Merriwell will be placed under arrest. Last night he was a guest at the home of Fairfax Lee, where this brooch was stolen. To-night he is arrested with it in his possession, and that means the everlasting downfall of the great and mighty Merriwell. Are you ready to help bring this about?"

"If you ever blow on me, I'll shoot you!" hissed Packard.

"Blow! My dear fellow, am I not in the same boat? I can't blow. Will you do it?"

Packard held out his hand.

"Give me that brooch!" said he; "I'll do it!"

CHAPTER IV.

DUNNERWURST DANCES.

Harry Rattleton was taking Ephraim Gallup and Hans Dunnerwurst round to see the "sights." Of course, he brought them into Jackson's.

"Waal, dog my cats ef this seems to be such a much of a place!" muttered Ephraim, as he looked over the general barroom.

"Uf id does," said Hans gravely, "you vos a liar."

"All the same," said Harry, "this is the joint where the dead-game sports of the college get together."

"I don't see menny of um here naow," drawled the Vermonter.

"This is not the hour to find many present. They may be found here late at night."

"Vale, I belief you hat petter prought us aroundt late ad night, Raddles," grunted Hans. "I vaunt to seen der blace ven dere vos some oxcitement. Yaw."

"Oh, yeou're a great feller fer excitement!" grinned Gallup. "Yeou kicked up a great rumpus when yeou fell overboard frum that steamer an' gut me arrested fer draownding ye."

"Ded sdeamer nefer fell oferpoard vrom me!" cried Hans earnestly. "I vos knockit oferpoard, und don'd you vorgot id! Uf Vrank Merrivell couldt catch dot Yank Joykill, dot veller vould haf to gone to chail. Yaw!"

"Waal, that critter's skipped aout uv New Haven, an' so there ain't much chance uv ketchin' him. I'm darn glad to git off with my skin."

"Yaw!" You vos luckiness. I god all ofer vet mit varter der Sound indo."

"Har! har!" laughed Ephraim. "An' it wasn't the time of year fer yeour reg'ler annual barth, was it? Har! har! Wonder it didn't make ye sick."

"Id vos awfulness," declared Hans. "More as vorty gallons uf dot saldt varter swallowed me. Py chiminy! id makes me dirsty now! Who vill had a peer mit me?"

"Don't drink beer," urged Harry, as the trio sat down at one of the tables. "Take seltzer. You know we have a basket-ball game to play this evening, and we mustn't be loaded down with beer."

"Misder Raddleton, you don't knew me," said Hans grimly. "Varter may pe goot enough to vash yourseluf indo, bud it vos pad too much uf id to swallow. Uf id vill rustycate iron, vy von't id rustycate der human stomach? I vill took peer."

Rattleton laughed, giving a waiter an order for one lager and two seltzers. He realized that Hans had been brought up to regard lager as perfectly harmless and strictly the proper thing to drink. A temperance lecture on beer would be wasted on Hans.

At a table near-by sat a man with a full gray beard and gray hair. He was respectably dressed, wore spectacles, and carried a cane. Before him sat a glass of ginger ale, which he sipped with as much relish as if it had been a stimulating and intoxicating drink. He laughed

as he perused a copy of a humorous paper which he had found on the table. The boys gave him very little attention.

The drinks Harry had ordered were brought, and Rattleton paid for them. Hans seemed to toss off the greater part of the beer at a swallow, but he sipped the rest of it slowly.

"It seems to me," said Rattleton gravely, "that Merriwell has taken a big chance with Badger."

"What do yeou mean?" asked Gallup.

"Why, in this game of basket-ball. I fear we're going to be done up by that boastful Kansan."

"Don't you pelief me!" exclaimed Hans. "Vrank Merriwell don'd got done ub so easiness."

"But we have not obtained the practise we should have had," persisted Harry. "I can't understand why Merry failed to show up this afternoon and sent Hodge in his place."

"It was queer," nodded the Vermonter.

"He might have known we couldn't get along with Hodge!" exclaimed Harry. "That fellow has such a temper and disposition. Nobody can get along with him but Merriwell."

"An' so," drawled Ephraim, "we did not git the practise we'd oughter hed this arternoon."

"We've not had sufficient practise at all," declared Rattleton. "That's the matter. Badger's men are poor timber, with the exception of Hock Mason, but he's had them in practise enough to get them well up in the game."

"Who vos this Hock Mason?" asked Hans.

"Why, he's the big fellow from South Carolina. He was a bully at one time, but Merriwell took that out of him. However, he is a bulldog, and he can fight. He is the next best man to Badger."

"He may prove to be too gol-darn slow fer the game," suggested Gallup. "It takes fellers quick as cats to play baskit-ball, by gum!"

"Yaw!" said Hans. "Dot vos der reasonableness vy I vos tooken ondo Vrankie's team. I vos as quickness as lightnings."

The others laughed at the idea that the fat Dutch lad could be so very quick, at which he seemed to swell with indignation.

"I vos der greadest quickness you nefer saw," he asserted. "Und my feet vos lighdt ondo me. Shust look ad dese!"

The old man at the next table was softly whistling a jig tune as he perused the paper. Hans jumped to his feet and began to dance awkwardly. The man whistled louder, and Hans danced faster. It was an air to set feet to shuffling, and it seemed to carry the Dutch boy despite himself. The whistling was rollicking, clear, and beautiful, and the man, seeming to become aware that Hans was dancing, lowered his paper and watched the fat youth.

Everybody in the saloon turned toward Hans, laughing and encouraging him.

Faster and faster became the tune, faster and faster flew the feet of the dancing lad. His face grew red and

flushed and he began to perspire, but still he kept on as that bewitching whistling continued.

It was laughable, and the spectators cried out encouragingly to the Dutch youth.

At last Hans began making frantic motions for the whistler to stop.

"Holdt on!" he cried. "Shust gif me a chance to got my feet control under. I vandt to sdop! Vait! Gif us a rest! I don'd been aple to sdop dancing till you sdop vistling!"

But the whistling continued, and Hans kept on, perspiration streaming from his flushed face, while the spectators screamed with laughter. It was a comical sight, for Hans was making frantic gestures for the whistler to stop, and yet he continued dancing, apparently against his will.

"Somepody hit him a club mit!" squawked the fat lad. "Somepody put his mouth a poard ofer!"

"Har! har!" roared Ephraim Gallup. "By gosh! I never sawr anything like this! Never knew Hans could dance like that before! An' that air whistlin' does akinder git inter a feller's feet an' make um want to go."

"Don'd let your veet got sdarted," warned Hans, continuing to dance. "Uf you do, you nefer vill peen aple to sdop! Blease, Misder Vissiler, shust led ub und gif me a chance to sdop. I vill craziness go a minute in uf I can'd sdop."

"Never knowed but one feller that could whistle like that," said Ephraim. "But that chap ain't Frank Merriwell, an' I guess it can't be his father."

At last, in trying to execute a certain step, Hans got the toe of one foot caught behind the heel of the other, tripped and came down with a crash that shook the building.

There was a round of applause from the spectators, and the whistler stopped to join in the burst of laughter.

At that moment the door opened to admit to the saloon Buck Badger and several friends.

CHAPTER V.

BADGER BACKS DOWN.

Walter Gordan Pink Pooler, Hock Mason, and Newt Billings were with the Kansan. Together the party made up Badger's basket-ball team. Lib Benson, the only substitute on the team, was not with them. Badger looked round the room, and then advanced and sat down at one of the tables.

"Well," he said, as the others took seats round the table, "I don't reckon it's any use to look further for him. He's not here."

"That's right," said Pooler, who was a senior, but had always carried a secret envy and dislike for Merriwell in his heart; "he's not here, and he's not to be found. It looks as if Frank Merriwell must be laying low. Perhaps he has heard that you're on his trail with money to force him to back his team. He's hiding."

"That's what!" cried Walter Gordan, the fellow who had attempted to rival Frank in their early college days, but had made a miserable failure of the attempt; "he must be hiding."

"It seems so," grinned Newt Billings, who had not forgotten the failure of himself and his friends to disgrace Merry. "He's keeping under cover."

Hock Mason was silent.

"Well, I'll allow that you fellows don't know an onery thing about Frank Merriwell!" growled the man from

Kansas, giving his companions a look of pity. "When did you ever see him crawl into a hole to get away from anybody? He's not one of the crawling kind."

They seemed surprised.

"Why, I fancied you did not like him, Badger!" exclaimed Gordan weakly.

"None whatever; you can bank on that."

"But you stand up for him when a word is said against him. How is that?"

"Say, you galoots don't understand me at all, that's what's the matter. And I reckon you understand Merriwell less. Just because I do not like him, do you fancy I'm ready to agree to any lying statement made about him? Well, I was not raised that way, gents! I don't like him, and I'm willing anybody should know it; but it is not because he is a sneak or a crawler, for I've never seen him crawl for anybody. It's because he is looked up to and worshiped as a great chief by a lot of slobbering idiots. It is because he accepts the homage of the aforesaid slobbering idiots and gathers them around him as his 'flock.' His flock! Bah! He is the only real man in the lot! That's whatever! And he has his weak spot. He'd like to be a king. He likes power, and he'd glory in ruling over an empire. I don't say he would not be a just and honorable ruler, but I despise him for his ambition. He seeks power and glory. He's obtained a great grip here at Yale, and thus far no man has been able to break it. I have fought him, but it has been on the level in every instance. Once I did do a thing for which I allow I was ashamed afterward,

though I wouldn't say so to him. I kicked him when he was down in a game of football, hoping to put him out of the game."

"I know the time," said Billings quickly, "and you were not to blame for it. You had every provocation."

Badger stared hard at Newt, and then suddenly roared:

"I had no provocation whatever, save that I was mad as a locoed steer, and it was an onery thing for me to do! No man could make me say so to Merriwell, but I was to blame for that trick, because I let my temper get away with my head. But I'm not built on the cool and steady plan, and I do some things before I think. This Merriwell always stops to think before he does anything. That's the difference between us."

Billings was taken aback, but he laughed awkwardly and said:

"All right, old man; have it as you like. I didn't come in here to discuss Merriwell, for I do not consider him worth discussing. We will wipe up the rink to-night with his old basket-ball team, and that is going to give me satisfaction enough. Have a drink with me. What will it be—whisky?"

"Now, wait a little, my headstrong friend," advised Badger, scowling in a manner that indicated his intense displeasure. "I asked you gents to come in here, and you are to drink with me. More than that, it will not be whisky."

"Well, this is a queer place to drink anything but whisky," said Billings, "though I see some of Merri-

well's friends over there"—jerking his finger toward the table at which sat Rattleton, Gallup, and Dunnerwurst—"are indulging in soft stuff. That's the matter with them—they must be as soft as the stuff they drink."

"You're welcome to your opinion of Merriwell's friends, but we play basket-ball to-night, and I do not propose to feed you on whisky. I came here because I thought we might find Merriwell, though I know he does not hang around this joint. I believe he never comes here unless some sort of duty calls him into the place."

"Duty," said Gordan, with a sneer, "is good!"

"All the same," declared Buck, "you know, and I know, that Frank Merriwell does not drink and does not frequent drinking-resorts. You may say what you like about him, but I advise you to stick to the truth. I've found out that it seldom hurts an enemy to lie about him. It may seem to hurt him for a time, but in the end the lie is found out and it comes back home like a boomerang. Mark what I say, in four cases out of five, a lie finally hurts the inventor more than the one it is invented about. That's whatever!"

Badger smashed his fist down onto the table, and then motioned to a waiter, who approached.

"Johnny," said the Kansan, "set out the sarsaparilla."

"For a chaser?" questioned the waiter, with a sly twinkle in his eyes. "What comes before it, sir?"

"Nothing—by the great salt Cimarron, nothing! And if I hear that you have given any of this crowd a drink of liquor or wine this day, shoot me if I don't wring your neck! Let them have what they want to-morrow, but

they drink soft stuff to-day, with cold water for a chaser!"

The waiter hurried away, for it was plain Badger was in anything but a pleasant mood. Of course, not a little of this talk had been heard by Rattleton and his companions. The gray-bearded whistler had overheard some of it, also, and it seemed to please him in a remarkable manner. He opened out his paper and lifted it before his face, as if buried in its contents, but once the paper was seen to shake, as if the person who grasped it laughed.

Ephraim Gallup put a hand on Rattleton's arm.

"Say," he drawled, "that rantankerous critter frum aout West needs to be curried daown, an' I'll bet a good fat squash he gits whut he needs. Talk abaout wantin' to be king ur emperer! Great cats! he'd jump at the job, an' he'd make ev'rybuddy toe the mark, b'gosh! The trubble with him is that he's jellus because Frankie cuts more ice than he does."

"Yaw!" nodded Hans. "More ice cuts Vrankie than id does Puck Padger, und dot vos vot's der madder mit Hannah! He gifs me a pain in his back!"

"We'll give him a pain when we git at him!" asserted Ephraim, wagging his head.

"But he's a hard man to beat, and his crowd can play basket-ball," said Harry.

"Dang it! did yeou ever know Frank Merriwell to git beat?"

"Yes."

"Yeou did?"

"Yes."

"Waal, by gum!"

"But," added Harry, laughing, "he didn't stay beaten. If you down Merry, he refuses to stay down."

"Dot vos correction," agreed Hans. "Ven he vos down, he comes ub quick as nefer vos. Yaw!"

The Dutch boy was mopping his perspiring face with a handkerchief and breathing hard from his recent exertions, but attention seemed turned for the moment from the whistling stranger. The drinks Badger had ordered were brought and placed on the table. Gordan gave a toast:

"Here's defeat to Frank Merriwell's basket-ball team."

They drank. Seeming in a better humor, Badger said:

"Fellows, we put in some great practise this afternoon, and I believe we can defeat Merriwell's team, for he is to have that tall jay and the Dutchman. Why he has such freaks play with him is more than I can understand. Somebody told me those fellows actually played on Merriwell's successful ball-team last summer, but I do not take stock in it—none whatever. The Dutchman is too clumsy for basket-ball, and you will have a snap with him Pooler, Mason should be able to dispose of that clown, Gallup, and Rattleton never did do anything of any consequence. I supposed Merriwell would pick out the best men of his gang, such as Hodge; but the only fellow on his team, besides himself, who can play at all is Diamond."

Of course, they agreed with Badger. The whistling

stranger sat near enough to hear Buck's words, and his paper shook again, as if he had found some joke in it that was very funny indeed.

By this time Hans Dunnerwurst had regained his breath, and now his anger against the stranger suddenly flamed forth. Getting up, he waddled over to the man and cried:

"I vant to speech mit you!"

The stranger lowered his paper.

"What is it?" he asked quietly.

"Vot id is?" squawked Hans furiously. "You knew vot id is, und don't you let me vorgot id! Vot did you meanness by vistling?"

"What did I mean by whistling?"

"Oxactly, vot did you meanness? I did nod vanted to tance. You made me tance mit your confountet vistling, und I vanted you to apology for dot!"

"Why, hasn't a man a right to whistle?" asked the stranger, his eyes showing he was laughing

"Nod ven I haf to tance. I vos too bigness to tance. Id makes you tired ven I tance."

"Well, I declare!" said the man mildly. "You surprise me! I happened to whistle because I was feeling that way, but I will apologize, if I have offended you."

"Vale," said the Dutch lad, somewhat mollified by the man's manner, "I vill exception your abology, bud don'd let me done id again."

As Hans was turning away, Buck Badger spoke to him.

"Look here, Dunnerwurst," said Badger, "I wonder if you can tell me where I can find Frank Merriwell?"

"Vale," said Hans, "I don'd knew as I couldt. Id vos likely he peen addending his pusiness to alretty. Vot dit you vanted uf him, ain'd id?"

"I want to see if he has any sand to back his team. I'm willing to bet good money that we will beat you to death."

"Oh, you vos?" squawked Hans. "Vale, I vill pet you zwei hundert tollars Vrank Merriwell peats us you der sduffing oudt!"

"Here is a hundred dollars," said the Westerner, producing a roll of bills. "I will bet that and as much more as you like. I will back my team. I'll bet a thousand dollars that my team beats to-night! That's whatever!"

"Und I vill took dot pet!"

Hans seemed to utter the words, while the singular stranger rose to his feet and drew a roll of crisp new bills from his pocket. From the roll he pulled off ten one-hundred-dollar bills, which he handed to Hans, saying:

"Permit me to loan you the money to accept the gentleman's offer. Here is one thousand dollars, and I think you will be able to accommodate him."

Hans took the money in a bewildered way, while Buck Badger flushed hotly. Not having a thousand dollars in his possession, he found himself in an awkward position.

"Why should you loan him the money?" he snapped, glaring at the man.

"Because I wish to do so," was the quiet answer. "You made the offer to bet. Now, put up or—shut up!"

For a moment Badger was silent, and then he snarled: "This is none of your affair! I don't propose to put my money against yours! I don't know you, and I do not care to know you! I reckon that is plain enough!"

"I reckon it is," nodded the stranger; "but you were making some talk you could not back up. You have not a thousand dollars to your name, but you were trying to bluff this gentleman," motioning toward Hans. "The bluff did not go."

This was gall and wormwood to Badger, for no fellow could take a "call-down" with less grace, but what could he do? He weakly offered to bet one hundred dollars, but Dunnerwurst loftily refused to bet less than a thousand.

"Uf you haf der dough to pack yourseluf ub, I vos retty to met you. I nefer makes small pets like von hundret tollars. Yaw!"

"Oh, yaw!" snarled Badger, as he sat down. "I don't care anything about you. I was looking for your great hero, Frank Merriwell. I know he could not have the nerve to bet a thousand dollars."

"Don't you pelief me!" grinned Hans. "Vrankie vill shown you uf he hat some nerfe. Here, misder, vos der money. I vos sorrowfulness dot I don'd catch him vor a leedle pet."

He handed the money back to the stranger, who laughed and thrust the bills back into his pocket, after which he sat down and again picked up his paper.

Hans returned to his friends, and Ephraim Gallup wonderingly asked:

"Haow in thunder did yeou have the gall to say yeou'd accept that air bet when yeou didn't hev a thousan' dollars to yeour name?"

"I never said I vould oxception it," declared Hans, much to the surprise of both Eph and Harry.

CHAPTER VI.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

"But we heard you!" exclaimed Rattleton. "When Badger said he would bet a thousand dollars that his team won the game, you instantly declared you would take the bet."

Hans shook his head.

"I nefer didded it," was his surprising contradiction.

"Gol ding it! I heerd ye!" Ephraim squawked.

"I nefer didded it," the Dutch boy again asserted. "Id vos nod me do spokit it."

"Oh, come off!" broke from Harry.

"Scrate Gott! We both heard you! You book the tet—I mean, took the bet!"

"Vale, haf id so uf you likeness id."

"If you didn't, why did that stranger offer you the money?"

"I vish you vould toldt me vy he dit id, anyhow."

It was a puzzle, and the boys looked at each other in a bewildered manner. Hans persisted in declaring he had not opened his mouth to take Badger's bet, and the entire affair was rather mysterious. The face of the stranger was again hidden behind his paper.

All at once the door that led into the private back room swung open, and Donald Pike appeared, looking swiftly about. He seemed a trifle startled as he noted the students who were seated at the tables, but he as-

sumed a careless air, closed the door behind him, and sauntered toward the street door.

The gray-bearded stranger rose to his feet.

"Mr. Pike."

Donald stopped, surprised.

"I wish to see you a moment."

The man stepped toward him.

"What do you want?" asked Pike nervously, for, in his heart, he feared that this man might be an officer.

"I have been waiting here some time for you to come out of that room," declared the stranger, which still further increased Donald's alarm.

"Waiting for me?" asked the student, somewhat huskily. "I don't know you. What do you want?"

"I want you to return with me into that room."

The stranger had placed himself between Pike and the door, and the paleness of Donald's face increased.

"Why should I?" he asked, his voice husky.

"Because I request it. This is a serious matter. We will talk it over in there."

"No!" snapped Pike; "we will not! If you have anything to say, say it here!"

"Perhaps it might not please you. Let me tell you that I have been watching you for some time. I followed you from the room of Morton Agnew to this place."

Pike stiffened. So it was as he had expected; this fellow was a detective. Donald suddenly seemed to feel unseen bands of iron tightening about him.

"What right have you to follow me?" he suddenly demanded, forcing himself to be bold. "I decline to be dogged about!"

He was thinking of the stolen brooch, glad that it was no longer in his possession; but would not Roland Packard tell everything to clear himself in case he were trapped? Oh, if there were some way for Packard to escape from that room without entering the main saloon! But there was not, and it seemed that the trap was set so that it must hold its prey.

"You may decline," said the stranger quietly, "but you will find that you cannot help it sometimes. I followed you here. Another watches Agnew. And now I wish you to go back with me to that room, that we may talk together with the person you met in there."

So the man knew Pike had met somebody! Did he know whom? That question flashed through Donald's head. If the man did not know him, and if Packard could escape without being seen, all would be well. Pike felt that nothing could be forced from his lips by private detectives, and he was confident that the police would not push him too hard.

"Bah!" he cried. "You are a sneak who is trying to put his nose into what is none of his business. I have a right to go where I please, and I will not be dogged about by you."

The stranger eyed Pike in a peculiar manner, causing Donald to wonder where he had seen those piercing orbs before. Somehow, those eyes seemed to read him through and through.

"Only the guilty fear to have their movements watched," said the man, in an accusing way.

"I am sick of this!" snarled Donald fiercely. "I will not stand for your accusations!"

"What will you do?"

"I'll tell you: If you continue to dog me about, I'll smash you! That's business. Get out of my way now; I'm going to leave this room."

"Wait a bit."

"Not a second! Stand aside!"

"Hold on!" cried one of the barkeepers. "No fighting here! We won't have it!"

"Then make this fellow let me alone!" demanded Pike. "I am minding my own business, and he is interfering with me."

"All I ask of you," said the man, "is that you go back quietly with me to that room."

"You have no right to ask anything of me! I refuse! Get out!"

Donald attempted to thrust the man aside, but he suddenly found himself grasped by hands of iron. Never had he felt fingers with so much strength, and he cried out in sudden pain and surprise.

"Come quietly back to that room!" ordered the man.

But now Buck Badger stepped forward, his rugged face dark as gathering night.

"Look here!" he exclaimed, addressing the stranger; "this man is my friend, and I allow that you have no right to meddle with him. Hands off, you!"

Those strangely piercing eyes were turned on the Westerner, and, in a low, even voice, the man said:

"It will be well for you to keep out of this affair, sir."

But Badger stood his ground.

"I have a right to interest myself in the affairs of my friends, and I propose to do so. Take your hands off Don Pike!"

But his order was not obeyed, and the Kansan made a sudden movement to grapple with the unknown. His fingers caught in the man's beard, and, to his surprise, the whole affair proved false, coming off in his grasp.

A shout of surprise went up, for——

Frank Merriwell stood revealed!

Rattleton, Dunnerwurst, and Gallup were on their feet.

"It's Frank!" gasped Harry.

"It be!" gurgled Ephraim.

"Id vos!" palpitated Hans.

"Merriwell!" cried the others.

"Yes," said the unmasked student grimly. "That was a poor beard, and I wonder you didn't know me before."

"Vale, I vos a foolishness!" spluttered the Dutch lad. "Nopody but Vrankie Merriwell couldt vistle so dot I could not kept my feed vrom doing the hootchy-koochy."

For a moment Pike seemed paralyzed with astonishment, while Buck Badger fell back and stared. Then Donald made a desperate effort to break away suddenly and rush from the saloon, but those iron hands forced him to submission at last. However, there was a sharp struggle for some seconds.

Badger seemed in doubt, and Pike appealed to him:

"Are you going to let Merriwell use me like this, Badg?" he panted. "I'm your friend! Why don't you pitch in and give me a lift?"

"Just a moment, Mr. Badger," spoke Merriwell. "I have the best of reasons for asking Mr. Pike to accompany me back to that room. In there, as I firmly believe, is a person who, with Pike, is concerned in a very serious affair. If Mr. Pike will go back there with me, the three of us may be able to settle the whole business behind closed doors, so that the truth will not become known to the world. If Mr. Pike persists in refusing to return to that room, I shall go there without him and force the truth from the lips of the other man. He has his choice. Let him decide which course he will pursue."

Then those strong hands released the fellow, and Pike stood shaking and doubtful before the youth he hated. He longed to fling himself at Frank's throat, but fear of Merriwell restrained him. He longed to hold his head high and walk haughtily from the room, but fear that Merriwell might force a confession from Packard held him in check.

"If I go back with him, it is possible Packard will take his cue from me and deny everything," thought Pike. "I wonder how much Merriwell knows, and how much he suspects. I took him for a detective, but he has no authority to arrest any one, and he may be bluffed. Bluff is worth trying."

Having decided thus, he forced a smile of contempt to his lips, though his voice was not quite steady as he said:

"Mr. Merriwell is rather vague in his insinuations. I presume I have a right to meet a friend in that room. I will return there with him, now that he has ceased to try to force me, and let's see what he makes of it. Come on."

He walked toward the back room, with Frank close beside him. The others followed, and the door was flung open.

The room was empty!

Roland Packard was not there!

CHAPTER VII.

THE GAME BEGINS.

Quite a crowd of students had gathered to witness the game of basket-ball between Buck Badger's team and Frank Merriwell's five. Badger had challenged Merriwell to play, stating that he could get together a team that would be able to down anything Merriwell could pick up. To the surprise of everybody, Merry took onto his team his two friends who were visiting in New Haven, Gallup and Dunnerwurst. Those who did not belong to Frank's set were loud in their expressions of derision over this action.

To play basket-ball a man should be light on his feet and quick to think and act, and it certainly seemed that Gallup and Dunnerwurst did not meet the requirements. The general opinion was that the game would be a very ludicrous affair, and the larger number of the spectators had come expecting to laugh at the sport.

Some of Merriwell's admirers freely confessed that they were decidedly sore because Frank had chosen such a weak team, for, besides Eph and Hans, Rattleton was not regarded as strong, never having seemed to excel at anything.

To confess the truth, Bart Hodge felt that he had been slighted, and he was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. However, he came out to witness the game, but he was sullen and silent, though he would have fought

instantly had anybody said anything against Frank Merriwell. Sometimes Bart would condemn Frank of his own accord, even doing so to Merry's face, but had his own words been uttered in his presence by another person, he would have throttled the speaker.

As the hour for the game to begin approached, Badger's team appeared on the floor for practise. The men were dressed appropriately, and they made a good showing in a few minutes of swift, systematic work under the direction of the stocky Kansan, who seemed to be a born commander.

Donald Pike was on hand. After a time, he found Morton Agnew, and the two drew aside, where they fell to conversing in low tones. Pike's manner was triumphant. He related the story of Merriwell's discomfiture in Jackson's saloon.

"By George! I thought the fellow had me when he stopped me and demanded that I return to that room with him!" confessed Don. "I took him for a detective in his disguise. It beats the dickens how he can disguise himself so effectively."

"How did he act when Badger accidentally snatched off his whiskers?" softly asked Pike.

"Cool as a cucumber. It did not ruffle him in the least. He followed me from your room."

"And left that infernal detective to keep watch of me. He's watching me this minute, but the trail is broken, and he's fooled, for the stolen brooch is out of my hands."

"And mine, thank the Lord! Thunder! but it was a

relief when I found Packard had escaped from that room! Now the trail is broken, and Merriwell and his detective cannot follow the brooch. When that trinket is next heard of it will be found in Merriwell's possession, which means that he'll have to answer to the law as a thief!"

"Don't speak so loud! How did Packard get out?"

"Must have watched his time and slipped out while I was struggling with Merriwell. He left the saloon by the back door."

"Think he'll have the nerve?

"I believe so."

"Seen him this evening?"

"Haven't put eyes on him since I left him at Jackson's, but I don't believe he'll cave. Will your police captain be ready?"

"He's on hand."

"Merriwell came near getting onto the game, but he was not quite smart enough. It will be a knock-out when he's arrested. Oh, my! what a sensation to wind up the game with! And Badger's team will put it all over Merriwell's gang, so it is going to be a great night for us."

"A great night!" nodded Agnew, his eyes glittering evilly. "It is the night I've long prayed for. I see my triumph at hand, and I'm eager to taste it!"

Originally Pike had not seemed such a very bad fellow, but he had been led into crooked ways, and now he found himself well on the path that leads to destruction. Nevertheless, the look that now came to the face of Agnew made him shrug his shoulders and draw a bit away

from the fellow. Pike hated Frank Merriwell, and for that reason had become an associate of Morton Agnew, but he regarded Agnew as a fellow who was treacherous and untrustworthy, and, for all of the bond that held them together, there was no love lost between the two.

"Where is Merriwell and his mighty five?" asked Pike, looking around. "I hope he shows up."

"Oh, he'll show up," nodded Agnew. "Don't worry about that. The only thing I fear is that Packard may lose his nerve. I don't see him in the—— By Jove! there he is now."

"Where?"

"Over there by himself. See him?"

"Yes."

"He's looking this way. He is watching us."

"But," said Pike, "if I am not mistaken, that is not Roland Packard. It is his brother Oliver."

"Confound it all! how do you tell them apart?"

"It's quite a trick, and sometimes I am bothered; but I have gotten so I seldom make a mistake."

"Oliver is the soft one."

"Yes; he is not much like Roland. I wonder why he is watching us."

"You may be mistaken; it may be Roland."

"No, I am positive. We'd better separate. It is just as well that we're not seen talking together too much."

So the worthy rascals drifted apart.

The practise of Badger's five was applauded at times. After some minutes there was a sudden bustle, and Merriwell's team came from the dressing-rooms. Some of

Merry's friends started a round of applause, but there was derisive laughter from a few who regarded the team as a whole with derision.

Badger took his men off the floor, and Merry put his team into practise, which consisted of passing the ball and making tries for the basket.

Pretty soon the referee and umpire came onto the floor. The final arrangements were made, and then the referee called the two centers to the middle of the floor, while the others of the rival teams took positions facing the men they were to cover.

Suddenly the referee tossed the ball straight into the air.

As centers, Badger and Merriwell had faced each other, the former stout and determined, the latter perfectly proportioned and no less resolute in appearance.

Both leaped for the ball, but Frank was the quickest by a fraction of a second, and he gave the ball a slap that sent it directly into the hands of Gallup.

Mason leaped for it, but Ephraim towered far over him, and shot the ball for the basket with an overhand throw. It landed fair and remained in the basket.

The first goal had been made by Merriwell's five almost before the spectators realized the ball was in play.

CHAPTER VIII.

BADGER'S INJURY.

"By gum!"

Ephraim Gallup seemed as much surprised as anybody. He stared around as a shout of applause went up from the crowd.

"Vot vos the madder mit dot?" cried Hans Dunnerwurst, who was left guard. "Efy, you vos a beacherino! Yaw!"

Badger's men seemed bewildered for a moment, but Badger coolly observed that it was an accident.

The ball was brought back to center, and again Frank and Buck faced each other.

"You have loads of luck," muttered the Westerner, "but the streak will break."

"If it is all luck—yes," admitted Merry, in the same low tone.

Up went the ball and up shot the two centers. Again Frank was the quickest, but this time he skilfully shot the ball across to Rattleton.

But Harry seemed to trip, and Billings had the ball a second later. Billings snapped it over to Mason, but this time Mason could not pass it, for Gallup's long body towered above him. He was forced to send it back to Billings, but Rattleton came in like a flash and made a backward throw over his head, landing the ball in Merriwell's hands.

Badger had stuck like a leech to Merry, and he attempted to get the ball, but Frank turned on his heel and cast it to Hans. Dunnerwurst slipped, grasped at the air, and came down on the floor with a thud that shook the building, while the ball fell into the clutch of Pooler.

Diamond had left his man, and Pooler found Jack right upon him. He tried to cast the ball over the head of the Virginian into the hands of Badger, but Diamond seemed to shoot upward as if from a spring-board. His hand stopped the ball, and Pooler made a lunge to recover it, but fumbled it into the clutch of Dunnerwurst, who was still sitting where he fell.

Hans gave a bouncing push to the ball, which sailed fairly over the heads of the players into the hands of Gallup, who had been uncovered by Mason in the excitement, and the lank Yankee shot it for goal once more, but missed by a narrow margin.

This was exciting, for the spectators were beginning to realize that Merriwell's team was more than holding its own, something they had not anticipated. Badger's friends shouted encouragement.

"Go for them, Buck!"

"Don't let them keep the ball!"

"Get into the game, Badger!"

"Wake up, Mason!"

"It's your turn, Billings!"

Jack Ready climbed onto the shoulders of some friends, and cried:

"I'm willing to place some long green on Merriwell's

five! If any anxious Badgerite has a collection of wampum that he wishes to donate to the poor and needful, let him back his choice, and I will cover it with some microbe-infested bank-notes. Gentlemen, please take note that I have the stuff to back my talk."

He flourished a "roll."

"You're getting too gay!" shouted somebody. "Come down!"

"I decline," retorted Jack. "I'll not be called down."

But at this juncture he was dropped, and he gathered himself up with protestations that he had been outraged.

But the game was going on swiftly, Badger's team exerting every nerve to push the play. With the ball in their hands, the Badgerites worked it down to the forwards. Billings got it and attempted to try for a goal, but Rattleton was before him. Newt seemed to contemplate an overthrow, but changed quickly and shot it under Harry's arm across to Mason, who flipped it cleverly into the basket, and the score was tied.

"Dog and cats!" muttered Gallup, in disgust. "I warn't in the right place that time."

"No," said Frank swiftly, "you should have been covering your man. Don't chase the ball, but stick to your man."

"I gut so darn excited that I clean fergot it."

"Don't forget. Keep it in mind all the time."

This was advice Merry had given every member of his team time after time, but in the heat of the game it was forgotten.

The ball was brought to center.

"The wind has changed, I reckon," said Badger, with some satisfaction, as he was again facing Frank.

"A slight flaw, that's all, I fancy," smiled Merry.

"You can't beat us in a thousand years with that aggregation of freaks," boasted Buck. "You mustn't think they can play basket-ball just because they happen to be your friends."

"They seem to be doing pretty well."

"I wonder that you can't see the Dutchman is a tumble-heels. Look how he fell down the only chance he's had."

"And passed the ball forward while sitting on the floor so that Gallup had a fair try for goal. His blundering came near counting three against you."

There was no time for more words, as the ball was tossed into the air at this moment. This time Badger struck the ball, but his haste spoiled his judgment, and he drove it into the hands of Rattleton.

Harry was covered by Billings, and he passed to Gallup. Ephraim found it impossible to make a try for the basket, and he was forced to send the ball back to Frank, who had closed in. Merry got it, and seemed to have a clear chance to cast at the basket, but Badger made a leap and—a tackle!

Down they came.

Toot! sounded the whistle of the referee.

"Foul!" was the decision.

That cut away one of Badger's points, and left Merriwell's team ahead.

When the ball was again put in play both teams worked swiftly and earnestly. Badger had been warned against fouling, but he held his temper, for, at a sacrifice of a single point, he had prevented what seemed like a certain goal for his opponents.

Badger's team seemed to choose Dunnerwurst as the weak point to attack, but in some blundering fashion the Dutch lad prevented the opposing forward from making a goal time after time. It seemed like luck, but there were those present among the spectators who began to suspect it was really good playing.

At last, however, Gordan scored a goal by a chance throw, and that put Badger's team ahead. Buck was elated, and he showed it. His men had met the best plays of Frank Merriwell's team, and Merry's players seemed weakening. Buck was confident that the remainder of the game would prove easy.

Never in his life had he made a greater mistake. He learned later on that Merriwell seemed to impart to his whole side some of his own never-say-die spirit.

The very fact that the first of the game was fought so fiercely by the Badgerites seemed to spur Frank's team on to its utmost, and Buck began to wonder after a time if it would not have been better had he resorted to strategy and a waiting game for the purpose of rushing things at the close of each period.

The ball went bounding on the floor, and Badger was over it instantly. He stooped to pick it up with both hands. Merriwell was close behind him also, and he

clutched the ball at the same moment Buck did, having reached between Badger's legs for it. Quick as a flash, Frank placed his left shoulder against the Kansan and pulled hard on the ball, at the same moment heaving with his shoulder.

If Badger had let go instantly, he might have saved himself, but he attempted to hold onto the ball, and plunged forward upon his head, which struck the floor heavily. He lay still, and the whistle of the referee sounded. Badger was stunned, and he was lifted and carried to a dressing-room.

Frank Merriwell would not leave till he was assured that Buck was not badly hurt. While he was waiting to become certain of that, the Westerner recovered and saw him.

Instantly a look of intense anger and hatred contorted the face of Buck Badger, and a deadly glare filled his eyes.

"You!" he grated hoarsely—"you did it! It was a trick to put me out of the game! You knew it was the only way you could win against us! Oh, I'll be even with you, Frank Merriwell! I'll square this yar score, or my name is not Badger!"

The play had been perfectly legitimate and allowable, and Badger knew it, but his anger blinded him to reason. Frank simply said:

"You will change your mind in a little while. I'm sorry you were hurt."

"You lie!" snarled Buck. "You're not sorry!"

Then he dropped back limply.

Frank left the room, and soon the game was resumed, Badger's place being filled by the substitute, Lib Benson. But in the dressing-room the furious Kansan continued to vow vengeance on Frank.

CHAPTER IX.

PACKARD'S STRANGE MOVES.

Having been attended, Badger was left alone, for the game was growing hot, and everybody seemed eager to witness the climax of the first period.

At first, Buck wished to get out where he could watch the game, but the thought that Frank Merriwell would have a sure thing now that he was no longer opposed by the strongest possible combination, caused the Kansan to change his mind.

"I won't witness his triumph," Badger muttered. "I'd like to drag him across the range at the end of a riata! I feel that I'd do anything to get even with him!"

A slight noise in an adjoining dressing-room attracted his attention. He stepped to the partition and peered through a crack. There was a light in the room into which he was able to look, and he plainly saw the person who had made the noise. It was Roland Packard.

In an instant, by the manner of the fellow, Badger knew Packard was up to some sort of crooked work.

"Wonder what he's in there for," speculated Buck. "That's Merriwell's room."

He continued to watch. Merriwell's clothes were hanging against the wall, and Packard swiftly approached them. The watcher saw the fellow thrust a hand into his pocket and take out something in a plush

case. The case was opened, and Badger gasped as the light struck on its contents.

"Diamonds, or I'm blind!" whispered the Westerner. "What in the name of all things crooked is that fellow doing?"

Packard's hands shook, but he worked swiftly. Badger saw him pin the brooch onto the inside of Merriwell's clothes beneath the lining. This done, Roland Packard turned quickly, after having dropped the small plush case into one of Frank's inner pockets, and hastened from the room.

"By all that's holy!" muttered Badger.

He was mystified, for he knew nothing of the Lee diamond robbery, which had been kept quiet by the police and those having a knowledge of it. Why should Roland Packard enter Frank Merriwell's dressing-room and conceal such a piece of jewelry about Frank's clothes?

Here was something worth investigating. Strange fancies flitted through the head of the Kansan, none of which he felt like accepting as an explanation of what had happened.

While he was wondering over the occurrence, he seemed to hear another sound from Merriwell's room, and once more he applied his eye to the crack. What he saw added to his mystified condition.

A youth slipped quietly into the room, stole over to where Frank's clothes were hanging, and seemed to search them. He soon brought forth the plush case that had contained the diamond brooch, and then, after a

few moments more, he held the brooch in his hand. It was then that he turned so that Badger could see his face plainly and distinctly.

"Roland Packard!" whispered the astonished Westerner. "Now, why the dickens has he come back, and what is he up to now?"

Still watching, Buck saw Packard hastily return the brooch to its case, which he closed and slipped into his own pocket. Then, without delay, he got out of the room.

"That beats!" muttered the Kansan. "It's plain the fellow changed his mind, after having made his first move. Whatever his game was, he lost his nerve and backed out."

In puzzling over Packard's strange moves, Badger forgot his injury, and for a time the game slipped from his mind. He resolved to keep still about what he had seen and await developments, and then he heard the gong that told the first half of the game was over.

"And I reckon Merriwell has the game won by this time!" he bitterly grated.

But, when the perspiring players came in to be rubbed down and to talk it over, he learned that, after his departure from the floor, Merriwell's team had made one goal and one foul, which left the score tied.

"If you could play the last half, sah," said Hock Mason, speaking to Buck, "I believe we could win the game easily, sah."

"Well, then, I'll play if it takes my hide!" exclaimed Badger. "That's whatever!"

CHAPTER X.

A SENSATIONAL FINISH.

When the two teams faced each other for the second half, Badger was again in command of his men at center, and he was given a hearty cheer, which he did not acknowledge by motion of hand, head, or change of countenance. He looked grim and fierce, as if he meant to play for his life. For the time, he completely forgot about Roland Packard and his strange moves.

When the face-off came, Badger struck the ball at the same instant with Merriwell. Up in the air it shot again, and again both were under it, and hit it when it came down. This time, however, Buck deflected it to one side, and it went into the hands of Pooler. Dunnerwurst covered the goal and slipped down. Pooler tripped over Hans and lost the ball. Badger tried to recover it, but Frank blocked him off, permitting Diamond to come in with a rush, scoop the ball and send it down to Gallup, who found a clear try for the basket, but missed.

It was impossible to say that Dunnerwurst had tripped Pooler intentionally, so no foul was declared, but it seemed certain that Pink must have made a successful try for Merriwell's basket had not Hans slipped so that the Badgerite fell over him at that instant. It was another of Hans' blundering acts that turned out very fortunate.

Gallup was much chagrined over missing the basket

and permitting the ball to fall into the hands of the enemy, but Frank's voice urged his men on, and the game grew hotter and hotter. Three times Merriwell's team dribbled the ball and passed it up to the forwards, who made tries for goals and failed, greatly to the relief of Badger, and to the delight of certain spectators who were hoping and praying that Badger would win. Gallup was disgusted.

"By gum! I guess I better go crawl under somebody's old barn an' die!" he muttered. "I'm feelin' so ashamed I kinder wisht I'd staid to hum on the farm!"

But Frank encouraged him, and he continued to play with as much vim as possible. Now, however, it did seem that the wind had changed, for Badger's team took the offensive, and Merriwell and his men were kept hustling to prevent them from making goal after goal.

By persistent hammering, the Badgerites finally succeeded in landing the ball in the basket, and again they were in the lead.

Shortly after this, when Rattleton had a clear try for a goal, Billings fouled, but, according to the agreement before the game, this simply took one point from the side making the foul, which still left Badger's team two points ahead.

Billings was warned by the referee, but the warning did not seem to impress the others, for, within twenty seconds, Mason fouled Dunnerwurst, thereby stopping another goal.

"Clevah work, by Jawve!" drawled Willis Paulding, who was one of the spectators.

"I fail to see where it is at all clever," said Gene Skelding, who was one of Paulding's companions. "Badger's men have made three fouls."

"But don't yer see they are still one point ahead?"

"Yes, but that's because they are playing according to the rules of '94. If Badger had not insisted that the game be played by those back-number rules, Merriwell's crowd would have had three free throws for the basket."

"That's where the clevah part of it comes in," asserted Willis. "Badger knew his team would have the advantage undah the old rules, and that's why he insisted on playing by them, don't yer 'now."

"Great Scott! I'm just beginning to get it through my head!" confessed Skelding. "I wondered why the dickens he hung to those out-of-date rules, but I see it was because he saw a foul would not count so much against him as it does under modern rules."

"Exactly," smiled Willis. "Mr. Badger is a very clevah fellow."

Indeed, Badger had taken advantage of the weak point in the rules under which the game was being played, and his team still led by one point, although it had made three fouls to one made by the other side.

But Frank Merriwell was not slow to catch on, and he found time to put the others of his five onto the trick. That Badger should resort to such methods seemed to anger everybody, and once more Merry's men took the offensive.

The game was drawing toward the end, and the play

was of the whirlwind order. All at once something happened that set the spectators to roaring.

Getting the ball, Frank found himself near the middle of the floor with his back to the enemy's basket, and Badger blocking him from making a pass. Instantly he cast the ball backward through the air in a graceful curve and—landed in the basket!

When the witnesses in the balcony realized what had happened, they rose and cheered wildly.

"Vot vos der madder mit dot?" shouted Hans Dunnerwurst. "I pelief pasket-pall can blay Vrank Merrivell a liddle pit, ain'd id?"

"Great stuff, by gum!" grinned Ephraim Gallup. "Naow we're ahead, an' we've gut to stay there."

This was easy enough to say, but Badger had no thought of giving up. He realized that but a short time remained in which to win the game, and he sent his men into the play with all their vim and skill. Merry's men seemed to stand on the defensive now, and Badger tried to make the most of the last few seconds of play. Among the spectators, his friends encouraged him as well as they could. Once Dunnerwurst prevented a goal from being made, and twice Ephraim's long reach served the same purpose, and then, by a desperate throw from near the center of the floor, Badger scored.

"That wins!" said Morton Agnew, who held the watch in his hand. "Badger has the game, but where the deuce is your man Packard, Pike? Our game is going to fall through!"

"I saw him a little while ago," answered Pike; "but

he has disappeared. He must be fixing things now. Is your police captain ready?"

"Yes, and waiting. He's getting impatient, too. Presume he thinks the thing has fizzled."

"There's Packard!" breathed Pike. "He's looking this way! By Jove! That's the signal! The trap is set, Agnew! Put your policeman onto Merriwell! The stolen brooch will be found on the fellow's clothes in the dressing-room!"

The ball was in play once more, but only a few seconds remained before the game would end, and Badger's team was one point ahead. It seemed that Merriwell was facing defeat.

In those few remaining seconds both teams strained every nerve, perspiration pouring from their faces. Just before the end came, Dunnerwurst seemed to lose his head, for he ran down the floor, leaving the enemy's left forward by himself. It seemed a great opening for the Badgerites to secure another goal.

But the ball was in the hands of Merriwell's men, and it was rushed down the floor, apparently with the idea of giving Gallup another opportunity to try for a goal. But the ball was not passed to Gallup. Instead, it shot into the hands of Dunnerwurst.

However, Billings had suspected that the Dutch lad might make a try for the goal, and as Hans faced the basket with the ball, Badger's tall right guard was before him. Billings loomed up with one hand extended high, so Hans could not throw over him.

Suddenly, with surprising quickness, the Dutch lad

stooped and gave the ball an upward swinging fling right between Billings' legs! The result was electrifying, for the ball sailed upward and dropped into the basket, scoring another goal for Frank Merriwell!

By this remarkable throw, Dunnerwurst had won the game, for the gong sounded one second after the ball landed in the basket.

CHAPTER XI.

AN APPEAL FOR MERCY.

In the midst of the uproar and excitement caused by this unexpected and sensational termination of the game, Police Captain Gregg walked onto the floor and advanced toward Frank Merriwell, upon whose shoulder he placed a hand.

There was a hush, and every one heard the officer distinctly and triumphantly say:

"I have trapped you at last, Frank Merriwell! You are under arrest!"

Frank was astounded, as his face seemed to indicate, but he quietly asked:

"What is the charge against me, sir?"

"Robbery!" answered Gregg grimly. "You have in your possession the valuable diamond brooch stolen from the home of Fairfax Lee last evening!"

"I think you are greatly mistaken," returned Merry, with a smile of contempt. "You are barking up the wrong tree this time, Captain Gregg."

"Not much!" was the positive assertion. "I know what I am doing! I rather think I can prove it, too."

Two other officers now advanced onto the floor, and Gregg said to them:

"Go to this fellow's dressing-room and bring his clothes out here. Search them carefully, and you will find the stolen property."

The officers hastened to obey this order, while Frank waited in scornful silence for what was to follow. Buck Badger stood looking on, his rugged face wearing a strange expression of perplexity.

Frank's clothes were brought out onto the open floor of the rink, where the search began in full view of the spectators and the players, who watched the proceedings with breathless interest.

"Waal, this is a gol-darn outrage!" declared Ephraim Gallup. "It's a put-up job, an' I know it!"

"You had better keep still!" growled Gregg, who was holding fast to Merry. "You may get into trouble, too."

"Yeou can't muzzle me!" squawked the country boy. "Yeou arrested me once on a false charge, an' Frank Merriwell gut me aout of the scrape. I guess, b'gosh! that's whut ails ye naow. Yeou're tryin' to git even."

"Yaw!" said Hans; "dot peen der madder mit him. He vos so mad pecause I reclined to stay murdered dot he don'd knew vot to done."

The officer's face showed his anger, but he was watching the work of the two men who were searching Merriwell's clothes. Some of the students came swarming onto the floor, but the police captain ordered them to stand back. Among them were Agnew, Pike, and Roland Packard.

With his hands on his hips, Frank Merriwell stood still, and calmly watched the men who were searching his clothes.

The search progressed carefully till every article had

been examined, but not a trace of the stolen brooch was found.

Captain Gregg was furious; he ordered one of the men to guard Merriwell while he took a hand in the searching. This was done, and again Frank's clothes were thoroughly investigated, but the brooch did not come to light.

Gregg looked baffled, while there was an expression of stifled incredulity and amazement on the face of Roland Packard. Agnew and Pike were filled with wonder and dismay. Was it possible Packard had failed them? They looked at the fellow and saw he was quite bewildered.

The second investigation of Merriwell's clothes having failed to reveal the brooch, the police captain faced Frank and snarled:

"What have you done with it, sir? Tell me the truth!"

"I know nothing about it."

"Don't lie!" roared Gregg, who found himself in an awkward position. On all sides hisses were heard. The college men were getting angry.

"It's an outrage!" cried many voices. "Frank Merriwell would not do such a thing! It is a petty revenge!"

Buck Badger suddenly stepped up to Captain Gregg.

"Look here," he said, "I happen to know what has become of that brooch—or I reckon I do."

"Then speak out!" commanded the officer. "Where is it?"

Buck pointed straight at Roland Packard.

There was another sensation. Packard turned pale for a moment, but he did not cower or try to get away. Gregg, however, developed a sudden distaste for searching anybody.

"How do you know so much?" he grated, glaring at Buck, as if longing to club him. "What reason have you for making such a charge?"

"I'll tell that in court," answered Badger. "I demand that you search that man!"

"Well, I'm done searching for to-night," said Gregg; but Packard stepped forward, crying:

"It seems that I've been accused of something here, and I demand that I am searched in the presence of these witnesses! It is no more than fair for me."

Gregg seemed to hesitate, while Agnew and Pike breathed hard.

"What the devil ails him!" whispered Donald. "If he did not get it onto Merriwell's clothes, he must have it in his possession! Is he putting up a bluff!"

But Packard was not bluffing, for he continued to insist that he be searched, and this was done in the presence of the entire crowd. The stolen brooch was not found upon him.

When the search was over, Packard walked up to Badger, saying in a loud tone:

"Whatever your trick was, it didn't work! You've hurt nobody but yourself, and I think you've proved yourself a liar!"

Buck lifted his clinched fist, but did not strike. After a moment, his hand dropped by his side.

"Not now," he muttered. "How you got rid of it I don't know, but there are some things I do know, and I'll make it mighty uncomfortable for you by telling."

"Tell and be hanged!" said Packard, turning away.

* * * * * * *

That night, on the way to their rooms, Pike found a chance to speak privately to Packard:

"A nice mess you made of it!" he grated, speaking softly. "What did you do with that brooch?"

"Hid it on Merriwell's clothes," answered Packard, "and I dropped the case into one of his pockets, to make sure it would not be overlooked in the search."

"Come off!" snapped Pike. "That doesn't go down! Why wasn't it found?"

"I'll give ten dollars if you'll answer that question; but, somehow, I fancy that fellow Badger knows something about it."

"Well, I say you made a mess of things. Merriwell is free, and the brooch is——"

"The devil knows where! Don't try to chew the rag with me! I did my part of the job."

"Why didn't you give the signal before? Did it take you all that time to do your work?"

"No; I did it a long time before, but I wanted Badger to win that game, and so I held off."

"And that holding off ruined everything. I'm sure of it. While you waited the stolen brooch was removed from Merriwell's clothes."

"But who did it?"

"Perhaps we'll find out."

Pike never did, and it was many days before Roland Packard learned the truth from the lips of his own brother.

Buck Badger came up beside Frank Merriwell as they were walking toward the college. Then the Westerner told Merriwell just what he had seen through a crack in the partition that divided the two dressing-rooms. Frank was excited, but held himself in restraint.

"Badger," he said, "I believe you have put me on the trail that will clear up the whole mystery."

"Well, you're welcome," growled Buck. "I didn't do it out of love for you, but I don't care to see even an enemy pulled into a trap like that."

When Frank lighted the student-lamp in his room, he was astonished to discover one of the Packards sitting on a big easy chair before the open grate where no fire burned.

"Hello!' exclaimed Merry coolly. "Making yourself at home?"

"Yes; found a key that fitted the door, and I came here to wait for you," was the reply. The speaker was very pale, and his voice shook.

"I'm glad you came," said Frank. "I presume you brought the brooch?"

Oliver Packard leaped to his feet as if struck by a bullet.

"The brooch?" he gasped. "What brooch?"

"The one you so kindly removed from my clothes

after your brother had hidden it on them this evening at the rink," said Merry, in a confident manner.

"Why—how—how——"

Oliver stopped, stricken dumb by amazement.

"It's all right," said Merry. "You were seen by the same person who saw your brother pin the brooch to my clothes. He thought you were Roland, and that you had changed your mind about leaving it there. When he told me, I grasped the whole business at once."

Packard was shaking.

"It's true," he said huskily. "But my brother did not steal the brooch. It was stolen by another, who induced him to play this trick on you in order that you might be convicted of the crime. My God! the whole wretched business will come out, and that will implicate my brother. It will break mother's heart! She begged me to watch over him, and see that he did not go wrong, and I've done my best. Is there no way, Merriwell, that he may be saved from this disgrace and from the punishment? For the love of Heaven, spare him! Here is the brooch; I've brought it to you. You know what to do with it. Can't it be returned to its rightful owner and this matter hushed?"

Frank took the case from the trembling hand that held it toward him.

"Packard," he said, "I'm sorry for you. The only way to learn just who stole this brooch is to make your brother confess."

"And I know he will go to prison before he will be-

tray anybody. Again I beg you to spare him—for my sake—for the sake of his mother! You had a mother, and——"

Frank lifted his hand.

"I will do what I can, Packard," he said. "I will return the stolen property to its rightful owner, and lay the matter before that one. If she sees fit to be merciful, it will not be in my heart to bring shame upon you."

CHAPTER XII.

A NOISY INTERRUPTION.

The day following the events related in the preceding chapter, Stafford Browne, instructor in English literature, was droning on in his prosy way about Chaucer and the beginning of things in the English literary world. There was in Browne's manner and voice, when lecturing, something soporific, which the brightest student could hardly resist. Besides, the instructor was insufferably tedious at times. He was blissfully ignorant of all this, however, feeling sure that the things which so interested him and of which he delighted to talk by the hour were equally interesting and delightful to others.

Stafford Browne knew English literature thoroughly, but he did not know when to stop. Not once a week did he close on time. And when the subject seemed to have been exhausted, and the allotted time gone by, he would often go back in an exasperating way and fondly dilate on things already explained.

Frank Merriwell sat looking at the professor, who was new to Yale, seeming to hear every word, but with his mind far away. It was not Merriwell's custom to be inattentive in the class-room, but Browne's prosing often had that effect on him. He did not much like Browne, and he was sure this feeling was returned with interest by the professor. As he sat looking at Browne,

hearing the words in that dull way, which carried no meaning, he was thinking of the stirring incidents connected with the jewel robbery, and of the gross injustice that had been done him in that connection. For, indeed, he had good cause for resentment.

Stafford Browne was a good reader of faces, even if he was prosy and slow in his teaching, and he saw that Frank's mind was far away from Chaucer and all things connected with English literature. This palpable inattention irritated him, and increased his dislike of Merriwell.

Suddenly changing his tone and subject, he bluntly asked:

"Mr. Merriwell, can you tell me what causes the northern lights?"

With a jump, Merry came back from the land of dreams. He had heard his name, but he did not get the question; but he thought, for some reason, that it referred to Chaucer, and he knew he could answer almost anything Browne might ask him about that father of English writing.

"I have forgotten," he said, with a smile, for he saw that the professor had caught him. Then the smile broadened.

"I knew—before I went to sleep! If you will repeat the question?"

The instructor turned to the class with a grim look and cutting tone:

"Here is the only man in the world who ever knew just what causes the northern lights—and he has for-

gotten!" Merriwell laughed with the others. Then he looked at the clock which noisily ticked away on the wall. The lecture-hour was just expiring. The professor's eye was on him, and it was unfortunate for Frank that he glanced at the clock.

"Let us have attention, gentlemen!" said Browne sharply.

Each one straightened in his seat, and silence fell. But scarcely were shoulders squared when the silence was noisily broken.

Ting-ing-ing-ing-ing!

An alarm-clock, hidden somewhere out of sight, went off with a sound that struck through the stillness like the clangor of a fire-bell in the night. Most of the students jumped as if shot, for the explosion of a gun in the room could not have been more startling. Merry was as much surprised as the professor himself, but with the professor's eye on him, he held his astonishment in check. Browne reddened as the hidden clock clamored on. He knew what it meant.

"Chaucer's Canterbury Tales," he began, determined to continue, in spite of this emphatic hint that the time had expired.

Ting-ing-ing-ing-ing!

Another clock, concealed at the opposite side of the room, pealed forth its alarm. It was a noisier clock, with a tone that was peculiarly strident and irritating. Stafford Browne's face became redder. With two clocks going at once, it seemed impossible for any one to hear,

but, determined not to be thus put down, he began once more:

"Chaucer——"

One of the clocks ended its alarm, but another, hidden apparently in or near the bookcase, rattled out in a high-keyed call.

"Chaucer——"

Buzz-z-z-z—ting-ing-ing—ing-ing-ing!

Still another clock sounded its warning.

"You will have to Chaw-sir!" thought Frank. "I'm sure we can't hear you, and you might as well quit working your mouth!"

Nearly every one in the class was broadly smiling, some were laughing outright, and others, with difficulty, keeping themselves from an explosion. Frank looked as grave as an undertaker, with his eye fixed on the professor, as if trying to understand and appreciate what the latter was trying to say.

The perspiration started out on Browne's red face, and an angry light shone in his eyes. He felt that he had been grossly insulted. He did not know that he was prosy, though he knew he often talked on beyond the time assigned for the lecture; yet he reasoned that the worst he could do in that way did not warrant such an insult as this.

He saw that Merry was almost the only one in the class who was not laughing or smiling. He did not understand that this was because Frank sympathized with him in this moment of humiliation, and had really no desire to laugh. He thought it an indication that Merry

knew all about the alarm-clocks, and had perhaps placed them there to ring out when the hour expired. In that moment he hated Merriwell more than ever.

"Gentlemen, this is insuf——"

Bang-whang—bang-whang——

An alarm-clock that had a gonglike arrangement, which went by fits and starts, began to sound its brazen call. It was worse than any of the others. Two had stopped, but three were dinning away with the impetuous clangor of fire-bells.

"Gentlemen, this is insufferable!" Professor Browne shrieked. "The authors of this outrage shall be called to account for it! I mean what I say! I will discover the perpetrators and it will go hard with them!"

Clang-ang-ang-ang!

An alarm shrilled out from the desk before which he sat.

Ding-ing-ing-ing-ing! went another clock in the far corner of the room.

Bur-r-r-r-r-r-r! came from behind the seat where Merriwell sat.

B-i-n-g—ing! b-i-n-g—ing! b-i-n-g—ing! rang from a spot that seemed to be beneath Stafford Browne's coat tails. Six or eight noisy alarm-clocks were sounding their warnings at once. The instructor looked as if he would fall in a fit of apoplexy. He could not make himself heard, though he tried once or twice; and, seeing he could not, he dismissed the class with a motion of the hand and fled from the room.

"That was too bad!" said Merriwell, speaking to one of his classmates.

"Funniest thing that ever happened!" declared the other, doubling up and shrieking with laughter. "I thought I should burst! I couldn't keep my face straight to save me. Served him right, too! Why don't he get a gait on him? He's slower than a snail!"

Similar expressions were heard on every side. Few, if any, sympathized with the long-winded professor who had met such discomfiture and humiliation. Merriwell began to laugh himself, for the thing was desperately funny, and the contagion of the laughter of his companions was not easy to escape.

"I wonder who did it?" he queried.

The student looked earnestly at him.

"Somehow, I fancy that you could tell, Merry, if you would! You never cracked a smile while we were all just dying. You would not laugh, because you thought he'd spot you. But I believe it would have been better for you if you had turned yourself loose. He saw your desperate effort to keep still, same as I did, and he will be likely to feel about it as I did!"

"I don't know a thing about it, Barton!" Frank protested.

"Oh, come off! You don't need to tell! But you can't fool me!"

The clocks, some of them, were still whirring away, and a new one started in as Merry and the youth talked.

One of the students picked up this clock, and the

other noisy things were searched out, together with the one in the professor's desk. Then it was seen that the clocks had been taken from the rooms of students. Some of the juniors recognized and appropriated their property.

But who put the clocks there? That was the question which agitated every one, and there was no answer to it. There were accusations and counter accusations, for, somehow, it seemed to be taken for granted that the clocks had been smuggled into the room and set by some member of his junior class, who had been annoyed by the prosiness of the instructor and wanted to get even with him.

"I believe it was you, Merry!" insisted the young fellow with whom Merriwell had first spoken. "You were as solemn as an owl, and I don't see how you could have been unless you knew what was coming and braced yourself for it. If I had tried to hold in that way, I should have died. I think it was you, old man; but of course, I expect you to deny it to the last gasp. You'd be a precious fool if you didn't!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MERRIWELL ACCUSED.

"Look out! Browne is coming back!"

The student who said this and whose keen eye had caught the approach of the instructor, fled from the room, after giving his warning. Merriwell was stooping in a searching way over a spot from whence he fancied one of the clocks had sounded its noisy alarm. But he, too, hurried away when he heard the words.

A little later a request for an interview reached him from the instructor.

"He suspects me, just as Barton did!" was Merry's reflection, and the thought made him uneasy. "But I hope I can convince him that I had nothing to do with the thing. If I had laughed in his face I suppose he would not have thought me guilty, but because I didn't, he thinks I had a purpose in keeping still. A silly course of reasoning!"

When Frank entered the presence of Professor Browne, he saw that the latter's face was as white as it previously had been red. It was so white and stern that it was ghastly. There was an ominous look, too, in Browne's eyes.

"He has it in for me!" was Merry's thought.

Then he gave a start, which the instructor did not fail to note. On the table by Browne's hand was Merriwell's alarm-clock.

"I sent for you to tell you that I have your clock!" said the professor, with ominous stiffness and coldness. "As I came back to the room I saw you searching for it, but my coming disturbed you before you could get it. But I found it in the very spot where you were looking, and I have it here!"

Frank did not need to ask how Browne knew that the clock was his, for his name was on it.

"I presume that you would deny your property but for this!" said the professor sternly, indicating the name with his long forefinger.

A flush came to Merry's face.

"It isn't well to condemn any one without investigation or explanation," he answered. "But I am afraid you have done that. That is my clock. I have no disposition to deny it. But I did not put it in the room; nor did I put any of them in there; nor do I know who did!"

"I hoped that you would be willing to make a clean breast of it," said the professor. "The clock proclaims your guilt, but not more certainly than your manner did when the alarms were sounding. It was a despicable trick, of which no gentleman would be guilty. You cannot expect that I will forget it!"

Merriwell's nostrils dilated just a little, but his voice was cool and calm as he replied:

"I am not in the habit of having my word doubted, Professor Browne! Those who know me can assure you of that. I trust that I have some honor!"

There was a pained look on Browne's white face.

"I have never had anything to so hurt me as this. And your denial makes it worse. I shall be frank with you, Mr. Merriwell. There has seemed to be a coldness between us, for some reason, but I did think you a man of honor—one far above such a thing as this!"

"I trust that you have no good reason to doubt my honor!" Frank declared.

The professor's look of pain changed to a sneer of unbelief that hurt Merriwell more than words.

"Does it seem likely to you, Professor Browne, that I would have used my own clock if I had been the author of the trick? Would I have not been careful to keep my own clock out of the room?"

"You did not suppose that I would see the clocks. But that is what I hastened back for—to get a look at the clocks. Most of them had been hurried away, and you were stooping for this one when I appeared. I saw it all!"

"Then you are determined not to believe me, even when I positively declare my innocence?"

"I shall keep this clock for a time," the professor went on, quite unaware that he had accidentally made a joke. "It furnishes proof which I do not care to part with at present. I am going to look into this matter. I am sure that several of the students were in the plot. They were very anxious to hurry their clocks away. Of course, I do not expect you to reveal the names of any of them?"

It was a questioning declaration in which appeared the professor's belief that if Merriwell was innocent he

would reveal the names of the students who had hurried out with the clocks. Merry understood its import.

"If I shall give you the names of the men who took clocks from the room I should be probably doing great injustice, as you can see. It may be that none of those men are guilty. Likely, every one of them knows no more how the clocks came to be there than I do."

"I see that there is no use to discuss the matter or waste time in further questioning," said Browne, thus indicating that the interview was at an end.

"None whatever!" Merry answered. "It does no good to investigate a case that has been judged and decided in advance!"

He was indignant, as the flush on his face showed.

"You will learn some time, I hope, professor, that you have greatly wronged me," he said, as he turned to go. "I know nothing about those alarm-clocks!"

Gil Cowles, Mat Mullen, Lib Benson, Newt Billings, Chan Webb, with a number of juniors, were waiting outside for Merry's appearance.

All were in high glee, for they had a good idea why Merriwell had been sent for, and they rejoiced in his discomfiture, though openly professing to be his friends.

"Tell us about it," said Benson, when Frank came out. "We're dying to know. Has the old cross-patch got it in for you?"

"Look here, fellows, I half-believe that you know something about this business—about who put those alarm-clocks in the lecture-room!"

Gil Cowles laid a finger against the side of his nose and winked solemnly, while the others laughed.

"If we did, we would not be big fools enough to tell!" said Chan Webb. "We've been afraid, though, that Browne had it in for you. We've been holding our breaths for you, while you were in there!"

"I hope you didn't injure yourselves by it," was Frank's sarcastic comment.

Somehow, the protestations of these pretended friends made him weary.

"Oh, we gasped a few gasps, just to keep us alive!" said Newt Billings, with a laugh. "We couldn't die until we knew what Browne said to you!"

"No need to get your lives insured, then," said Frank, "for you will live a long time!"

"Oh, well, if you don't want to tell!" and Gil Cowles turned loftily away. "But we saw that the professor had it in for you. I hope you won't be hauled up before the faculty!"

"I'll send for you when I need your help and advice. If you fellows have been waiting out here to crow over me, there is nothing to crow over."

And Merriwell turned away, without deigning to further satisfy their curiosity.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PAIR OF PLOTTERS.

The alarm-clock story spread over the college and divided interest with the latest baseball news and sporting gossip. It invaded Traeger's and Morey's, and was discussed with much earnestness by the loungers at the fence.

"Heard the latest name of that professor?" chirped Bink Stubbs, from his perch on the fence, to Merriwell, who came up with Browning and Diamond.

"No," said Merriwell. "What is it?"

"Fire Alarm Browne! Good name! He is so dull, you know! It's as if you'd name a snail Maud S."

"It's reported that he called you back and accused you of setting up that job on him!" said Bob Brewster.

"Is it?"

"I've got news for you, Merry," remarked Dismal Jones, from his position on the top of the fence, where he sat humped up like a turkey buzzard. "You can't guess it!"

"I think I'll not try!" Merriwell declared.

"There's a fellow in town by the name of Paul Rains, who says he used to know you at Fardale."

"What? Do you mean it?" cried Frank, greatly astonished.

"Sure," said Dismal, grinning sadly at the surprise which shone in Frank's face. "I saw him myself!"

"Where did he come from?"

"I don't know. Dropped from the skies, likely. Anyway, he's got a funny balloon that he's experimenting with up in the skies. I hear he's as rich as sin!"

All of Merry's set heard the news with considerable interest, for Frank had mentioned Rains more than once. Jones chuckled in his dismal manner, for this was a bit of news he had been holding back to spring on Frank in this way.

"When did he arrive?"

"Dunno!" said Jones, stretching out a leg and hopping awkwardly to the ground. "All I know is that I saw him. He is down here to get up some kind of water sports, he said. He is going to have some kind of rowing, and some baseball, and football, and every other sinful diversion that you can think of. He's got a lot of money and he's blowing it in on sports. The ways of the wicked are past all understanding."

This was news indeed.

"I'd like to see him," Frank declared.

"That's what he said about you. 'Tell Merriwell I'd like to see him, and expect to, and that I'd like to do him up in some of these games.' I can't quote his words. Ain't good at quoting! But that's the heft of it."

"Merry can beat him in any old thing he wants to take up!" Bart Hodge declared. "He always could beat him, and I know he can still."

"Not still, but in motion, you mean!" chirped Bink. "Say, fellows, take me to this wonder!"

Agnew was sauntering by and overheard the words. He thought they applied to him.

"I'll make them think I am a wonder before I get through with them!" he muttered. "I'm not done with Merriwell yet!"

Morton Agnew had been in an uneasy and irritable mood ever since his failure to ruin Merry's reputation by means of the jewel robbery.

Agnew had been much with Roland Packard since that time, and by close study of their faces and outward peculiarities he was now able to tell the brothers apart, without committing the dangerous error of mistaking Oliver for Roland.

He hurried on now, boiling with rage, and as venomous as a rattlesnake, and turned after a time toward the room of the Packard brothers.

"I hope Oliver isn't in," he muttered. "He's a regular milksop! And he doesn't like me. He thinks I am dangerous company for his brother, and keeps warning him against me. As if I or any one else could injure Roland Packard! I fancy that I am up to a thing or two, but that medical student can give points in cussedness to any man I ever saw."

Oliver was out, to the great joy of Morton Agnew.

"Glad you dropped in," said Roland. "I've been wanting to see you."

"Same here, old man. That's why I came over. You've heard the alarm-clock story?"

"Cert. It's everywhere."

"I saw that professor when he left the class-room. He was as white as a sheet. I've seen angry men, but he was the maddest thing that ever walked. I'm told that he lays the whole thing to Merriwell. Now, isn't there something in that for us?"

"I've been thinking of that," Roland answered. "There ought to be, if we're bright enough to think it out. I've sat here an hour, twiddling my thumbs, trying to think how we can further anger this professor against Merriwell. It would be simply great if we could get Merry pitched neck and heels out of Yale."

"I'd be almost willing to lose my right arm to bring that about!" Agnew declared, with fierce emphasis. "I never hated a man so in my life! When I think of the dirt he has done me, I get so hot I almost choke."

Roland gave him an appreciative look.

"I know just how it is, old man, for I feel the same way. If I can do him dirt, I'll do it. But the rascal seems almost to bear a charmed life. We have got to be careful about my brother Oliver. He will give our schemes away. I had a high old row with him yesterday."

"He takes Merriwell's side?"

"Not exactly, but he thinks I ought not to try to hurt the scamp. And then, he is timid. Though he looks almost like me, we are not at all alike."

"No, for you have the heart of a lion!"

"And he has the heart of a calf!"

"Couldn't work any kind of drug-game?" Agnew anxiously asked.

Roland sat for a moment in silence.

"Tell you what, old man!" giving his knee a resounding slap. "I've got a plan!"

Agnew's face flushed with pleasure.

"What is it?" he eagerly demanded. "Give it to me quick. If you'll furnish the plans, I'll work them, or risk my neck in trying to. Some sort of a plan to throw him out of Yale?"

Roland Packard rose from his chair and went to the tall medicine-case in the back of the room.

When he returned he held a paper in his hand.

"This is the stuff!" he said, his face lighting with fierce joy. "And I'll tell you how to work it."

CHAPTER XV.

A COWARDLY DEED.

Professor Stafford Browne stopped, with an exclamation of surprise, and bent over a young man who lay prostrate by the side of one of the campus paths.

"Frank Merriwell!" he whispered.

The youth was indeed Frank Merriwell, and, as the odor of liquor came strongly from his person, it is little wonder that the professor was astonished.

"A man who would do such a despicable trick as putting those alarm-clocks in the lecture-room to insult and humiliate me is just the kind of fellow who would have no more manliness or honor than to make himself beastly drunk!" was the professor's mental comment. "And that's just his condition—too drunk to know himself, or where he is!"

Then occurred the thought that perhaps Merriwell had been assaulted and knocked into unconsciousness by some ruffians who had sought to rob or injure him. With this in mind, Stafford Browne turned Frank so that the light of the nearest electric lamp fell on his face.

Merry was breathing heavily, almost stentoriously. There was no visible wound, and nothing to indicate in any way that he had been assaulted.

"Just a common drunk!"

Although the discovery pained Stafford Browne, who was a loyal son of Yale himself, and therefore touched

by anything that tended to lower the Yale standard of manliness, he could not help being, in a measure, gratified by the discovery. He was a man of extreme sensitiveness, and the alarm-clock insult had gone very deep. He had brooded over it until he was almost unfit for his duties. He had been unable to discover the perpetrators, but he never wavered from his first conclusion that Merriwell knew all about it, and had a hand in it, if he was not the sole perpetrator.

"I suppose I ought to make some report of this!" he muttered, looking into Merriwell's face. "Just a plain drunk! And Frank Merriwell has always claimed, I have been told, that he is strictly temperate. But these things are bound to come out one by one by and by. No man can continue a bad habit without reaching ultimate discovery. I cannot afford to try to shield him. I shall not try to shield him!"

The odor of liquor was so overpowering that the professor was fairly sickened by it. And when he touched Merry's clothing, they seemed to be saturated.

"He has broken a bottle in his pocket!" thought Browne.

His hand fell on a bulging lump, and though he questioned within himself whether he should pursue his investigations further, he put his hand into the outer coat pocket and found there a large flat bottle, which, when he drew it out, he saw was filled with whisky.

"Now, what shall I do?" he wondered, looking about. "Shall I try to get him to his room? He is heavy, and I shall have to call help. I don't care to turn him over

to the police, even though he has so wronged me. He is still a Yale man!"

Under the shadow of one of the campus trees, not far away, eyes were watching the movements of the professor. They were the eyes of Morton Agnew, and Agnew was chuckling beyond measure at the, to him, happy turn of events.

"I guess you are done up now, Mr. Frank Merriwell!" was the thought with which he solaced himself. "I've got a long arm and a sure one, as you are to find! And I never quit until I win. You have done me more dirt than you can ever pay for, but if you fall into disgrace, or get kicked out of Yale, I shall feel some satisfaction, anyway!"

He rubbed his hands gleefully, and fairly hugged himself with delight.

"Luck! luck! I couldn't have planned it better. I was going to leave him right at Browne's door, or as near to it as I could get him; but that might have created suspicion in some way. This can't. This is great!"

Morton Agnew had followed Merriwell down toward the boat-house that afternoon, trying to put into execution the plans evolved by Roland Packard. Previously, and after accepting the working of Packard's scheme, he had left with the rascally boat-keeper, who had been his tool before, a small package of white powder and some money.

Roland Packard had discovered that Merry sometimes took a drink from a certain water-cooler in the boat-house. The boat-keeper's work was to drug this water

with the powder if Merry came there alone at any time, in the hope that Merry would drink it. There were other plans, if this failed to work, but this had worked. Frank had taken a drink from the cooler shortly before starting on his return trip, had grown dizzy and stupid before reaching the vicinity of the college, and had been found in a semiunconscious condition by Morton Agnew, who had been hanging on his track like a sleuth-hound for the purpose.

As his muttered words showed, it had been Agnew's intention to leave the apparently intoxicated youth in front of the door of Stafford Browne's room, in the hope that Browne or some one rooming near him would discover Merry—a discovery which he knew would tell heavily against Frank in the mind of the already angered and prejudiced professor.

"What shall I do?" Stafford Browne was asking himself when he saw a well-dressed young man moving toward him under the campus elms.

"Ah! here comes help, most fortunately! A student, too, I think. The Christian and gentlemanly thing to do is to get Merriwell to his room as secretly as possible, regardless of his treatment of me. I can determine later just what course I shall pursue, and if I desire to make charges I can have the evidence of this young man who is coming."

The youth approached at a quick walk, for he saw the limp form on the ground with the anxious man bending over it, and rightly concluded that help would be appreciated.

"A student, I presume?" Stafford Browne asked, when the young man came up, for in a college so large as Yale no man can know the faces of all the students, and Browne, besides, had not been long at Yale as an instructor.

"No!" was the answer. "I am simply in New Haven at present for my pleasure. I am stopping at a hotel down-town. My name is Rains—Paul Rains!"

Morton Agnew had shrunk out of sight behind the body of the tree whose shadow had concealed him.

"And I am Stafford Browne, instructor in English literature."

"You seem to be in need of help," said Rains, looking down at Merriwell, whose face he did not at first see. "If I can assist you?"

"I was thinking that you might," said the professor. "I should like to get this young man to his room. It is some distance away, but perhaps we can manage it between us. He is a student, and I do not care to have him placed under arrest by the New Haven police."

Rains bent over the prostrate form and looked into the face on which the light now fell.

"Frank Merriwell!" he cried, starting up in astonishment.

CHAPTER XVI.

PAUL RAINS.

"I'd give something handsome if I could hear what they are saying!" Morton Agnew was muttering in his place of concealment behind the elm. "It's too bad I couldn't have given Merriwell a complete knockout! Don't I wish we could have done it! This seems trivial, after all, well as it is working, compared with that. Roland boasts of his nerve, but he has been ready to back water on any penitentiary proposition, since the failure of that scheme. Still, I believe I'd be willing to try it yet, and risk the consequences."

Agnew's hate was of that bitter, determined type which never dies. Now he was so filled with palpitating nervousness and hilarious delight that he could hardly keep himself concealed.

"You know him?" said Stafford Browne, in answer to Rains' bewildered exclamation.

"I used to know him. We were in school together once. But I didn't dream that he had taken to booze. Know him! I could never forget that face. It's Merriwell, sure! I'd recognize that face at the other side of the world!"

Merriwell moaned and put up a hand. Rains and Merriwell had not always been friends in the old days. They had been rivals in the athletic circle at Fardale, and Rains had not scrupled to use at times unfair means to

gain his ends. Something of that old feeling still remained in his heart, though time and intervening events had softened the harshness of the memories of those old antagonisms. Now he felt sorry for Merriwell.

But Rains was still a wire-puller, and it occurred to him that it might be a good thing to get on the warm side of this Yale professor. He believed that Browne was grieved over Merry's condition, and that a good word in Frank's behalf would not be wasted. So he began to sing Merriwell's praises, and to dilate on the strangeness of the present instance of drunkenness.

"We must get him to his room," said Browne, who was not pleased with these commendations. "If a police officer should come along we might find explanations awkward."

Rains, who was a strong, athletic fellow, bent over Merriwell, and, with the assistance of the professor, got Frank on his feet. The movement of lifting him seemed to arouse Frank in a measure, for when on his feet and upheld between them he was able to move one foot after the other.

"He's full to the brim!" Rains jocularly remarked. "I haven't seen a fellow so soaked in a long time. I never knew Merry to go on such a bender. I hope he hasn't taken to drink as a regular thing!"

"He has had the reputation of being a total abstainer," was the truthful reply.

"Boozing on the quiet," suggested Rains, a little of the old feeling of antagonism struggling back into his heart.

"I am afraid so. He is very much intoxicated now."

"Drunkest thing that ever rolled! He's as flabby as a jellyfish, and he smells like a distillery."

Thus they talked, in low tones, as they slowly moved with Merriwell in the direction of his room.

It was much more difficult, when they arrived there, to get Merry up to his room. They could have summoned help, but Stafford Browne, with a strange tenderness for the man who he felt had insulted and humiliated him, and because of the Yale spirit which was so strong in his breast, desired to get Frank out of sight without any of the students discovering his condition. This was accomplished at last, and Frank was placed on his bed, just as he was, with his clothing on and smelling horribly of liquor.

Browne turned to the door when this had been done, as if anxious to get out of the room.

"We can't do anything more for him," he remarked. "He will sleep this off and be all right by and by. Hardly worth while to call a doctor?"

"No," said Rains, in reply. "But I think I'll camp down here a little while. Perhaps some of the boys will drop in. I'd like to see them."

He looked curiously round the room when Stafford Browne was gone.

"Hodge is at Yale, I'm told," he reflected, as he finished his survey. "I never liked that fellow, and I know he has no love for me."

The thought seemed to give him satisfaction and he chuckled.

Then his mind went back to the old days at Fardale,

and to the many contests in which he had been pitted against Frank Merriwell.

"He was a good one," he muttered. "But I really think I was even better! He downed me a number of times, but there was always a reason for it. I fancy he can't do me now. I've kept in good athletic trim, and I know a few!"

Rains was a fellow who seemed modest and retiring, but who was, in truth, exceedingly conceited. Although he never openly boasted, he had a way of thinking that he could accomplish almost anything. He always pretended to be indifferent to any prospect of advancement, but was ever ready to lend himself to any scheme that promised to put him ahead of a competitor.

That had been his character at Fardale, and it had not greatly changed in the intervening months. He was as devoted to sports as ever—in fact, more so, for he had become a sport enthusiast; and, as he was now in possession of wealth, he could gratify this love to his heart's content.

"There will be a lot of baseball and football, and every old thing in the way of fun and athletics at Yale this spring, and, of course, Merriwell, if he doesn't booze too much, will be in the forefront of it all. But I fancy, with my money and my willingness to spend it, that I can have a little sport here myself. And I can do that, too, if I never touch a bat or kick a football or dip an oar. I think it will be even a bigger thing to be a rich patron of sports than to be merely an ordinary athlete. And that's what I shall be. I'll have Merriwell and all

the rest ready to lick the dust off my shoes. For I tell you, it's money that makes things sizz! Mr. Paul Rains, I see fun ahead for you, and a reputation that will be something great, if you work the cards right."

He slapped his knee and beamed unctuously at a picture on the wall.

"And you may bet your life that I will work them right! Trust me for that! I don't fall down often, and I never go to sleep!"

CHAPTER XVII.

UNDER A CLOUD.

Lew Veazie threw up his hat.

"Fellowth thith ith the gweathetht thing that ever happened! Fwank Merriwell, dwunk ath a lord! I'm afwaid I thall die of palpitation of the heart!"

"Drunk as Ollie Lord!" said Skelding, not unwilling to give Ollie a sly dig.

Ollie Lord, addressed sometimes as O. Lord, lifted himself on his high-heeled shoes.

"I'd have you know," he said severely, "that I never drink anything stronger than wine or tea!"

"Tell us how it happened!" Tilton Hull begged.

Chickering's delectable set were in Rupert's extravagantly furnished apartments, smoking cigarettes and drinking tea. News of Frank Merriwell's supposed downfall had been brought in by Julian Ives, who now patted his beautiful bang and seemed to feel himself quite a hero because of the excitement and commotion his information had created.

"Well, there can't be any doubt about it!" he declared, spreading his coat tails in front of the gas log that sent up a soft flame, even though the evening was not especially cool. "I got it straight from Morton Agnew, who saw him. Agnew says that he saw Professor Browne and this Paul Rains help Merriwell to his room, and that Merriwell was so drunk he couldn't stand."

Lew Veazie was fairly dancing with joy.

"Chummie, I mutht have another cigawette on that!" he declared, slapping Ollie familiarly on the back.

"The great and only Merriwell in the ditch!" sighed Gene Skelding, pretending to wipe away a tear.

"You shouldn't be too hard on the fellow!" urged Chickering, in his hypocritical way. "Almost any man is liable to fall. The better way would be to say an encouraging word to him."

"And get kicked for it?" snorted Lord. "I don't think! I'll spread the news as far and as fast as I can."

"You can bet we will, old fel!" simpered Ives. "That's why I hurried to you. I wanted you to know it. I want everybody to know it."

"I'm only thorry that I didn't thee him when he wath in that condition!" said Veazie, as he applied a match to the cigarette he had begged, and then breathed out a thin cloud of smoke he had inhaled. "Fellowth, if I had theen him then——"

"What would you have done?" Skelding derisively asked.

Veazie squared his thin shoulders, and tried to look very wicked.

"I'd have kicked him, thath what I'd have done! I'd have kicked the wathcal weal hard!"

"I can tell you what would have been better," said Ives, looking at himself admiringly in the long mirror, and noting that his pose was quite satisfactory. "If we could all have come on him when he was that way, we could have played the trick that Bill Higgins played on

us on the ice—we could have turned ourselves into an Eskimo dog-team and dragged him round the campus!"

"Don't talk about that!" said Skelding, almost fiercely.

"Skelding doesn't like to think of that ice-trap!" Chickering purred.

"There isn't anything about that whole business that we do like to think of!" remarked Tilton Hull, glaring severely over the top of his choker collar, which was quite wide enough to be worn as a cuff. "I've dreamed about that in my sleep!"

"And I've dreamed about it when I was awake!" Ives confessed. "Fellows, that was awful."

Lew Veazie poured for himself a cup of tea.

"Chumieth," he cried, with beaming face, "let'th dwink to the downfall of Fwank Merriwell!"

At the same moment Frank Merriwell and his friends were talking over the condition in which Frank had been found. Knowledge of it had spread throughout the college among Merriwell's acquaintances. Stafford Browne had said nothing about it, but Morton Agnew had fairly busied himself in circulating the report, giving it always the worst possible construction.

"Browne was scornfully cold in the class-room to-day," said Merriwell. "He tried to conceal it, but he couldn't. He thinks I was drunk, and he despises me for it, and he thinks I put the alarm-clock in the room, and he hates me for that. I can see that I'm going to have a very unpleasant time."

"If he believes those things about you, he's an ass!" declared Rattleton.

"But why shouldn't he? He doesn't know me quite so well as you do, my dear Harry! As for what a lot of fellows think who are my enemies, I don't care, but I do care for this. It touches my honor, you know. If I was intoxicated, as the professor believes, then I am a base hypocrite, for I profess to be a temperate man. And if I put those clocks in there to insult and annoy him because I grew tired of his tediousness, then I am not a gentleman! You see the light in which it places me!"

"I'm like Rattleton," said Hodge, "he's a fool for believing such rot. But isn't there some way to convince him of his mistake?"

"I should be glad to have you point it out to me," Frank answered. "I don't know of any way. He found me drunk, as he supposes, and I not only smelled of liquor, but I had liquor in my pocket. How are you to explain that away?"

"Tell him just what you believe," said Rattleton. "You are sure the boat-keeper drugged the water in the cooler, and that you got a drink of it. Some one who is your enemy put the bottle in your pocket and spilled the stuff on your clothes!"

"Sounds pretty fishy!" chirped Bink Stubbs. "I'm easy, but I wouldn't believe that story myself."

"You do believe it!" snapped Hodge.

"Sure! I don't only believe it; I know it. But I'm not the professor of English literature. He wouldn't believe it. It sounds as untrue as Jack the Giant Killer."

"We can go to the fellow in a body," drawled Brown-

ing, looking too lazy to go anywhere. "But, of course, he wouldn't listen to us!"

"Let's go and drown the boat-keeper!" suggested Danny, with a grave face.

"Or fill the cooler with ipecac, and make him drink the whole of it!" said Bink.

"I'd prefer to go out and whip Agnew and Skelding and Buck Badger, on general principles," growled Bart Hodge. "One of those three scoundrels did the trick. Likely they all know about it. And then I'd wind up by going down to the boat-house and pummeling that boat-keeper till he's black in the face!"

Hodge's dark countenance gloomed like a storm-cloud.

"The best thing to do," said Merriwell, who had listened quite unmoved by the angry comment of his friends, "is to wait. All things come to him who waits."

"That's the reason Browning is such a waiter!" squealed Bink. "Give Browning a lounge and an easy pillow and he can wait till the cows come home!"

"But I always lose my calm when I hear a calf bawl!" Bruce flung back at Bink.

"Sorry that Paul Rains saw you," said Diamond. "He pretends to be your friend. Perhaps he is. But I wish he hadn't seen you! He will make use of it by and by, if he thinks it will serve him."

"He acted the part of a friend," Merry reminded. "He helped get me home, and he stayed with me till you fellows came in. And, as you said yourself, he seemed sorry the thing had happened. And he has appeared to accept my theory, and does not believe now that I was

intoxicated. If we could get the professor to think likewise!"

"Just the same, I wish it had been anybody but Paul Rains," growled Hodge, still with the dark scowl on his face. "Rains is rich and flying high, and ought to be above any little meanness, but there were some things that happened at Fardale, you know! The leopard doesn't change his spots!"

"Which goes to show that Agnew isn't a leopard," said Danny. "When that fellow is deep in a game of poker he can change his spots just as he pleases. I've had the evidence!"

"I think the best thing to do is just to wait," Merriwell went on, as if not noticing this chatter. "It may take a little time, but I think Stafford Browne will come to know by and by that I am not what he believes me to be."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN AERIAL FLIGHT.

Paul Rains had planned to make his descent on New Haven in a spectacular manner. So he appeared as a young man of wealth, who was making expensive experiments with the new aeroplane kite in use to some extent by the weather bureau. He knew that this would draw newspaper attention to him, and that his wealth would attract about him a circle of genial spirits and friends. The newspapers were already full of his experiments and his praise, and whenever he sent up his kite people gathered to watch its evolutions and to listen to the learned remarks of the man employed by Rains to manipulate it. In addition, Rains had advertised certain water sports, and had been heralded by the zealous reporters as a rich sport patron.

This last was really true. Rains delighted in athletics of all kinds. He was an athlete of no mean strength and skill. He had been good in this line at Fardale, and he was far better now, for he had spent much time since in training. In the old days he had met Merriwell in more than one contest. Now he hoped to meet him again. But there was something even better than meeting Merry personally, he fancied, and that was to back some one who could defeat Merriwell.

He fancied he had found this person in Buck Badger, of Kansas, and he was prepared to go any length to aid

Badger, who, as he believed, "did not like Merry even a little bit."

"First tut-tut-time I ever sus-saw a lot of dry-gug-gug-goods bub-boxes flying in the air!" stuttered Joe Gamp, as he stared up at the queer objects tugging so strongly at the kite-line. "Dud-do you cuc-cuc-cuc-call that a kuk-kuk-kuk-kite, mum-mister?"

"Yes, sir," said the bearded man who stood by the little windlass on which the kite-line was wound as on a spool. "That is a kite."

"Then I've not got 'em!" squealed Danny. "I thought at first I had!"

It was indeed a queer kite. It resembled an ordinary kite not in the least, but seemed rather to be a couple of boxes, open at the ends, suspended high in the air, one above the other.

A balmier spring day one may scarcely ever see than that chosen by Paul Rains for his water sports. The kite was not needed to draw out the people, nor was the advertisement of the water sports needed for that purpose—the weather drew out and away from the city every one who could get away, and thousands who could not get away longed for a glimpse of the springing grass in the country, for the sight and odor of opening buds, for the trilling of the returning birds, for the sound of plashing waters, and for all the things which set the pulses to bounding after winter has loosened his icy grip.

"This kind of weather always makes me lazy," Bruce Browning remarked, with a smile.

Immediately there was a shout of delight.

"I should like to see the weather that could make you anything else!" cried Danny Griswold.

An idea struck Gamp and he "haw-hawed."

"Used to bub-be an old wether up in our bub-bub-back pup-pup-pup-pasture that would mum-mum-mum-make Browning gug-gug-get a move on him. Bub-best cuc-cure for laziness I ever sus-sus-saw. Had mum-more lifting power than a kuk-kuk-kuk-kite, too! I was sus-settin' on a bub-box aout there one dud-dud-day, lazier than a cuc-cuc-clam, when that old wether lifted me abub-baout ten feet right into the air. I sus-sus-sus-simply flew! A-haw! a-haw! a-haw! Oho! oho! oho!"

"We'll have to chip in and buy one to practise on Browning!" suggested Danny Griswold.

"If you'll come over here, I'll practise on you!" Browning declared. "I wouldn't waste breath trying to catch you, you little runt, but if you'll be accommodating enough to step over here!"

He feinted toward Danny, and the little red-headed joker, stepping quickly backward, stumbled over the small windlass. Instantly there was a whirring sound, as the windlass handle flew round. His fall had released the catch which held the windlass, and the kite-line was reeling out at great speed. Before Danny could scramble up, there was a jerking, snapping sound. Then, to the astonishment of every one, the string of the giant kite lifted Danny Griswold into the air.

Danny's friends, and the other spectators who had come out to take a look at the aerial wonder, were startled and alarmed at first. The whole thing seemed bewilder-

ingly strange. Danny was, himself, the first to understand that his danger was not great. Having made this discovery, his joking propensity came uppermost.

"Oh, I'm a bird!" he squealed. "Just see me fly!"

He flapped his arms as if they were wings.

"Oh, I'm a flying-fish! See me swim!"

Then he sprawled out with hands and feet like a struggling frog.

Frank Merriwell, who had taken a step forward, stopped and laughed. He saw, also, that the little red-headed joker was in no particular peril. The staple that secured the kite-line to the windlass had been jerked out and bent into the shape of a hook, and this hook, as it was snapped out of the windlass, had in some manner caught in the back of Danny's coat, between the shoulders.

One of these kites will lift a man, but the wind that balmy day was not of a character to give the kite great lifting power, and Danny was hoisted only a few feet from the ground, and dragged along in that way, kicking out with his hands and feet. The situation was so ludicrous that, when the spectators understood that Danny was in no immediate danger, there was a roar of laughter and chorus of exclamatory advice.

"Flap your wings a little harder and you can go over the moon!" some one shouted.

"The cow jumped over the moon!" sang Bink Stubbs.

"You mean the calf!" Browning dryly remarked.

"Will some of you fellows be kind enough to anchor me?" Danny Griswold called. "This is my best coat that is splitting up the back!"

"Dud-dud-dig your tut-tut-toes into the gug-gug-grass!" Joe Gamp advised.

"Toe be sure;" howled Bink.

"Those that fly high are bound to fall!" moaned Dismal. "And the higher they go, the worse the tumble. I shall never fly!"

"Come down, Danny, dear!" begged Browning. "We'll forgive you, if you will only return."

The manipulator of the kite had laughed at first, but now he was hurrying along as if for the purpose of releasing Griswold. The others were also following along, for Danny moved slowly. Merriwell stood still and laughed outright.

"Do you know what he makes me think of?" he said to Hodge. "A toad on the end of a fishing-line. I've seen toads hooked just in that way for bait."

The breeze was just right to carry the words to Griswold.

"You'll be toed, Mr. Merriwell, as soon as I get within kicking distance of you! Friends, I am suspended, as the man said when the government took the post-office away from him. Oh, this suspense is tearable! Don't you hear my coat ripping? If you want to befriend me, pull hard on my heels and end the thing quick, as the man said who was about to be hung! If you don't hurry, I shall get into such a habit of flying that I can't walk!"

The manipulator of the kite was not so anxious to release Danny as he was to secure the kite, for he saw that if the staple tore out of the coat and dropped Danny the kite might be carried some distance away before it came

down. Only a few bounds were needed to bring him up to Danny. Then, reaching up, he caught the little fellow by the legs and brought him by main strength to the ground.

"If some of you will assist me!" he begged.

Diamond hurried forward, accompanied by Joe Gamp.

"I cuc-cuc-can hold him," said Gamp, throwing his arms round Griswold's waist.

"Rescued! rescued!" Danny sighed, dropping his head against Gamp's breast. "Sir knight, how can I ever thank you? Hold me tight!"

"I'll tut-turn you loose, if you dud-dud-don't shut up!" Gamp howled. "This mum-mum-mum-makes me think of the tut-tut-time I tried to pup-pup-pup-play Darius Gug-Green and his flying-machine, and fuf-fell aout of dud-dud-dad's old bub-barn loft! Goshfry! I thought it would bub-bub-bub-bu'st me!"

Danny Griswold squirmed.

"I think you're trying to bu'st me, by the way you are squeezing! Do you think I'm a lemon, or your best girl?"

The man was tugging at the staple which had become so firmly caught in Danny's coat, and Diamond was striving to assist the man.

"Pull down on the line," said the man to Jack.

Diamond laid his weight on the cutting line and pulled as hard as he could, but not until some others had hastened to their assistance were they able to release Griswold.

"My first lesson in flying!" Danny solemnly declared,

as he dropped to the ground. "Gentlemen, when we return to the city I'll set up the seltzer! I hope this won't make you think that I am a fly!"

"No, you didn't look like a fly!" said Bink. "You looked like a winged monkey!"

"Don't get gay, Mr. Stubbs, or you will be kicked donkey."

Then he slipped out of his coat to ascertain how much of it had been damaged, while the manipulator of the big kite, with the help of willing hands, towed the kite-line back to the windlass and proceeded to fasten it there.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOWN BY THE WATER.

Danny Griswold's aerial adventure drew a swarming and excited crowd about the windlass. Paul Rains, who had been some distance away, approached at a run.

"I am employed by Mr. Rains to give that exhibition every day," said Griswold. "You didn't know that he hired me to do that, just as an advertisement? Well, he did, and the performance will be repeated to-morrow afternoon at the same hour! He gives me a double sawbuck every time I do that, and a brand-new coat."

Some of the gaping crowd looked at Danny as if they half-believed his statement.

"Trying to fly away with my kite?" queried Rains, as he came up panting. "How did it happen?"

The bearded man, whom he addressed as Tolliver, called his attention to the staple.

"Never saw anything like it," Tolliver declared. "He was as neatly hooked as if it had been done by hands."

Danny looked curiously at the staple. He had put on his coat, which was not badly torn.

"When I go fishing again, I think I shall try to be at the other end of the pole. It isn't so much fun to play bait."

"You seemed to enjoy it," the man reminded.

"Y-e-s, I seemed to. I think Mr. Rains ought to buy

me a beautiful new coat. This is the biggest kind of an advertisement for him."

Danny Griswold and his friends understood pretty well that advertising motives were at the back of a great many of Rains' new schemes, and it delighted him to be able to thus give Rains a sly dig.

"You'll have your name in the papers this evening," remarked Frank, with a smile.

"Yes, the immortal cognomens of Mr. Paul Rains and your humble servant will loom up by the side of that of the man who has had his liver pulled into shape by an electric belt and the man who has grown seven feet of silk hair on his bald head by the use of one bottle of Sixteen Sisters' Invisible Invigorant! Fame is reaching for me!"

"What if that thing had tut-towed you aout over the water?" Joe Gamp alarmingly suggested.

"Then I should have been toed out, like the yarn stocking when the old woman got through knitting it!"

"I shouldn't want to toe out," remarked Bink Stubbs. "Like the noble red man and the toothsome pigeon, I prefer to toe in!"

"I'll stick my toe into you, if you trespass on my original copyrighted joke-shop! That's whatever!" Danny squealed, in imitation of Buck Badger.

Bink fell back as if in dismay.

"They're getting ready for the water sport," Paul Rains announced.

"Water sport you are!" murmured Bink admiringly.

"I'm not a sport," Rains corrected. "I just go in for

sports, games pastimes, and the like of that! Merriwell, do you think you can beat Buck Badger in a little tug of war this afternoon?"

"I thought you had some Indians who were going to do that canoe tug of war," said Diamond.

"So we have, but Merriwell might want to try Badger, I thought. Badger thinks he can beat any one not a professional. And Merriwell has the reputation of being the cleverest man at Yale. He will want to uphold that reputation?"

"I'm not striving for any such reputation," Merry declared. "I've paddled a canoe, but I know nothing at all about a canoe tug of war."

"Simplest thing in the world," said Rains. "The best and strongest paddler is certain to win. I've some of the prettiest canoes down there that ever danced on the water."

"Better keep Danny away from the water, now that he's turned himself into bait," Browning dryly observed. "The fish may bite him."

Buck Badger had come down with Winnie Lee, Inza, and Elsie.

"I thought Inza and Elsie were going out of the city!" said Diamond, with uplifted brows.

Merriwell was equally surprised, for he had thought the same.

Inza and Elsie had detached themselves from the throng that was swarming down the slope, and, leaving Badger and Winnie, came toward Merriwell's party. Merry and his friends went down to meet them.

"We changed our minds," Inza explained. "That's a feminine privilege, you know! We couldn't lose this, we concluded, and so we came down here, and are going into the country on that trip some other day."

"We should have been glad to bring you down," Frank declared.

He spoke for himself and for Bart Hodge. But Bart was not as bright-faced as he had sometimes been in Elsie's company. He fancied that Elsie had not seemed as cordial and kind lately, and his pride was touched. Bart's pride was very easily touched, and he fancied slights and coldness often when nothing of the kind was intended.

"I just fancied that I cared for girls and for her," was his moody thought, as he somewhat glumly returned the greetings of these friends. "I used to be a girl-hater, and I think I must be now. It's not easy to change in such things. Elsie cares for Merriwell, and she doesn't care for me. That's the cold, hard truth, and I'm a fool for ever fancying anything else."

Joe Gamp began to tell in his stuttering way about Danny Griswold's experience with the kite-string.

"I'm a high-flier, like Mr. Paul Rains!" Danny gravely explained.

"You'd ought to have brought Binnie and Wadger—I mean Winnie and Badger—up here with you," suggested Rattleton.

"Buck didn't seem to want to come, and Winnie preferred to stay with him, of course," said Elsie. "Buck is preparing to take part in the water sports."

"I hear that you're going to pull against him in a canoe tug of war," said Inza to Frank.

"Who said so?" Merry asked.

"Why, I don't know. Everybody. We heard it all the way down. Some of the college boys have come down on purpose to witness it. You will pull against him, won't you?"

"I hadn't intended to," Merry answered. "I don't see why I should. He and Rains think I will be easily beaten at that, because I know nothing about it. I'm told Badger has been practising, both here and in a tank. Why should I meet him? I am not anxious to uphold any reputation for skill in that line. He thinks to drive me into meeting him. Why should I let him do that?"

He was speaking to Inza. He and Inza had dropped behind together, following Hodge and Elsie.

"Simply because I should like to see you defeat him, Frank. You can do it. I want you to take some of the conceit out of him. Winnie and I are good friends, you know, and in some ways I like Mr. Badger. But I am wild to see you pull him out of the water in this tug of war. He needs some lessons, and you're the only man who is able to give them to him! Oh, you must do it!"

CHAPTER XX.

WATER SPORTS.

"You musd dooded it!"

Hans Dunnerwurst came rolling up with Ephraim Gallup in time to catch the words of Inza's appeal.

"By gosh, if he don't go in and beat Buck Badger, I'll hev to myself!" Gallup declared.

Inza turned with Merriwell to welcome these friends.

"How are you, Hans? How are you, Gallup?" she asked.

"I vos vellness as you couldt expectorate," Hans gravely answered. "Only I vos matter mit myself like a snake-raddle pecause Vrankie ton'd vhip mit his hants tied dot Baul Rains und dot Padger Puck. Uf he ton'd bull dot dug uf var in, I shall go oudt und drownt himseluf!"

"I'm feelin' fust-rate, thankee!" beamed the long, lank Yankee. "Gol darn if this ain't great! I don't guess I shall ever want to git back hum on the farm if they keep up this sort of thing in New Haven!"

"Paul Rains is shouting for Harvard, you know!" Inza remarked to Merry, as they walked on together. "He seems to be wildly enthusiastic over Harvard. Is that simply because you are not a Harvard man?"

"Uf you ton'd meed dose vellows, Vrankie, I shall veel dot you ain'd der stuffings dot you used to peen!" Hans asserted, as he waddled along. "I shall pelief der

vay you haf peen lifings affections your prain! When I knewded you perfore you vos villingness to pattle anypody's canoe!"

Paul Rains had not done things by halves. The water-front at that point was filled with seats and a band-stand, and one of the best bands of New Haven had been engaged. A light breeze came in from the Sound and crinkled the waves like silk. A couple of Indians were paddling round in their canoes, making a great pretense of spearing salmon. There were a variety of other boats, big and little. And people everywhere, on the water and on the land. All had not come down to witness Paul Rains' water sports, but the water-sports exhibition received the benefit of their presence. In addition, some of the Yale crews were out in their shells, practising—a thing that was now of daily occurrence.

"Darn my pertaters if this ain't nice!" Eph exclaimed, as he smilingly surveyed the scene. "I ain't throwing up my hat fer Paul Rains, ner any other critter 'cept Merriwell, but this is better than a country picnic!"

"I say, Vrankie"—and Hans caught Merry by the shoulder and drew down his head to whisper in his ear—"how vos dot?"

"How was what?"

"Dot Elsie Pellwoodt und Inza Purrach piziness. Haf Elsie gone pack on your affections, ain'd it? Vos Party drying to exhibit himseluf py cutting you in?"

"That is just the same as ever," Frank answered, with a smile.

"Yaw, I supposition so! But I ton'd standtunder my-

seluf apout it. You vas gettin' me indo troublesomeness py und py, I pelief me!"

The band struck into a lively air, and the water sports were on. High over all soared the giant aeroplane kite.

"Gug-going to have bub-bub-bonfire," shouted Joe Gamp, as the Indians lighted a birch torch in one end of a canoe in which they had seated themselves.

The performance, however, was only a duplication of their previous exhibition of fish-spearing, except that the flaming birch torch was intended to show that the spearing was at night. When this was ended, one of the Indians held the canoe steady with his paddle-blade, and the other went through a lot of gymnastics, ending by turning a complete somersault backward and landing in the canoe in an upright position on both feet.

Merriwell clapped his hands.

"Can you beat it?" asked Paul Rains, who had taken a seat with Frank's party.

"No," said Merry. "I am not a circus athlete."

"That was about as difficult a thing as was ever done," Rains remarked. "For of all shaky things, there is nothing more treacherous and shaky than an Indian canoe."

"Or any other kind of a canoe," supplemented Merriwell.

"You couldn't duplicate it?" urged Rains.

The Indian was again turning his somersault.

"No. I shouldn't want to try. I don't profess to be able to do everything."

"He's able to do you, just the same, old man," hotly

asserted Rattleton, who was not at all pleased with the insinuating tone used by Rains.

"I am not able to say that he isn't," said Rains. "I haven't been through a course of training in the Yale gymnasium."

"Tell yeou what," said Gallup, grinning at Joe Gamp. "I kin pull yeou out of the water in one of them canoes, by gum!"

"Cuc-cuc-can't do anything of the kind, Mum-mister Gug-Gallup!" Gamp declared. "Bub-bub-blamed if I don't believe I'd like to pup-pup-pup-pull you!"

"Nothing easier," said Rains. "That's what we want, to make the day lively. I have enough professional people here to fill up the time, but the professionals must stand back every time for the amateurs. If you'll go into those canoes for a tug of war, it can be arranged in a minute. And I'll give ten dollars to the man that wins."

"Whoop!" shouted Rattleton. "Yank against Yank!"

"When Greek meets Greek the grease will fry!" sang Jack Ready.

"When dog meets dog the hair will fly!" parodied Bink Stubbs.

"If Yank meets Yank, I'll surely die!" chirped Danny Griswold.

"And if I gug-gug-get bub-bub-bub-beat I'll surely cuc-cuc-cry!" stuttered Joe Gamp, as he began to peel his coat.

"Yeou'd better be gittin' aout yeour handkerchief, then!" Gallup warned, as he rose from his seat to step toward the water.

"I'll wipe his tearful eyes for him," Rains promised, leaving his seat also to make the necessary arrangements and announcement.

Less than five minutes later Joe Gamp and Ephraim Gallup were seated, each in one of the Indian canoes. A man in another boat tied the sterns of the canoes together with a long cable, and all was in readiness for the tug of war.

Ephraim dipped his paddle cautiously, as if to test its strength.

"I feel as if I could zip this thing clean across the bay at one zip!" he beamingly declared, in a voice loud enough to be heard on the shore.

"Ho-ho-ho-hold on!" Joe warned, addressing his canoe, which seemed on the point of turning over with him as he shifted his position. "I nun-nun-nun-never cuc-could drive a kuk-kuk-kuk-kicking hoss!"

Then he, too, dipped his paddle and appeared to test its strength in the water.

Paul Rains stood on the shore with a pistol in his hand. He pointed it out over the water and fired a shot, as a signal for the beginning of the tug of war.

The people yelled with delight. As the pistol cracked, Joe Gamp gave a vigorous dip and pulled Ephraim Gallup backward a whole yard; but this advantage did not last long. Then Ephraim regained the lost yard, and the two canoeists settled down to steady work.

"Dey vos moving sdill, pretty fast," observed Hans.

"You mean they seem to be fast, and are not moving at all," said Inza.

"Yaw," Hans answered. "I mean dheir sdillness vos visibility to der naked eye. Yaw."

"I'm betting my wad on Joe Gamp!" screeched Bink Stubbs. "Hold him level, Joe!"

"And I'll put my little pile on Ephraim!" shouted Danny. "Pull him out of the water, Gallup!"

For a whole minute the canoes seemed to stand still, while the canoeists paddled with all their might. Then Ephraim Gallup, whose canoe was headed toward the land, began to get something of a purchase on his straining adversary. Slowly, inch by inch, he increased this advantage, and Gamp, dipping deep and dipping fast, was drawn to the shore.

CHAPTER XXI.

MERRIWELL AGAINST BADGER.

Buck Badger came up to Frank Merriwell. It seemed hard for him to smile, but he was trying to.

"I'd like to try you in that tug of war," he said.

Merry's friends expected him to decline, with possibly the exception of Inza. But, to their surprise, he instantly accepted the challenge.

"I'll go you, Badger!" he cried. "I thought I wouldn't, but the sport has seemed to get into my blood. I'll try you a whirl, just for the fun of the thing."

Badger beamed his satisfaction.

"Some other sports are to come first," he explained, his tone seeming to indicate a fear that Frank might doubt his willingness even after making the challenge.

"Any time!" said Merriwell. "I'm in no hurry. It's a lot of fun to sit here simply as a spectator."

Rains was talking to Danny and Bink Stubbs. And a moment later the little fellows were seen to go toward the water.

"Another canoe tug!" said Diamond.

But it was not a canoe tug. Danny and Bink were placed each in a big fishing-dory. Danny looked his huge boat over with a grin.

"I shouldn't have taken this contract if I'd known I was to navigate a schooner! If they'd put a mast in this, it would do for a coaster!"

"Oh, you're used to navigating schooners!" drawled Browning, in a tone that was not heard, however, beyond the circle of his friends.

The dory tug of war was funnier by far than the one engaged in by Joe and Eph, for the dories were so big that the little fellows could hardly row them. However, they tugged and strained, without accomplishing much, until Paul Rains at last decided that Danny had won the victory. The Yale crews drew near in their shells, curious spectators of the contests going on under the patronage of Paul Rains, and Rains finally succeeded in getting two of the crews to compete in a half-mile race, and to pull against each other in a tug of war.

Finally Rains stepped up to Merriwell.

"Badger is ready to meet you," he announced.

For some minutes Badger and Winnie had been seated in the circle of Merriwell's friends, laughing and joking.

Badger heard Rains' words and got up from his seat.

"Yes, I'm ready!" he declared. "Or I will be, as soon as I get out of this coat and into a sweater."

Winnie came over and took a seat by Inza and Elsie—the seat made vacant when Merriwell rose.

"It makes me feel queer to have Buck and Frank enter a contest," Winnie remarked. "I seem to have a presentiment that something will go wrong."

"I think it very likely that Buck will be beaten!" Inza observed, with a shrug of her shapely shoulders. "That is the only presentiment I have."

"But Buck is very strong, and he is skilful with a

canoe paddle," Winnie loyally insisted. "It may be that Frank will defeat him, but it will not be easily done. I was not thinking of that, though, I suppose it is because Buck and Frank are not on as good terms as they might be."

She was speaking in low tones to her girl friends. Nor was this the first time they had discussed the lack of cordiality that characterized the relations of Merriwell and Badger.

"It isn't Frank's fault that they are not on the very best of terms," Elsie urged. "I'm sure that Frank would like to be."

"I'm not so sure of that," Winnie argued. "I've had Buck tell me things to make me think he would gladly have been Frank's warm friend if he had received any sort of welcome."

"Of course, I suppose Merry isn't standing on the street with his arms open, begging people to come to him. If Buck and he are not the friends they ought to be, it's largely Buck's fault. Mr. Badger has something of a temper, you know, as I have discovered, together with a very stubborn disposition."

Winnie looked grieved at these words spoken by Inza.

"Forgive me, dear!" Inza pleaded. "You are loyal to Buck, and I'm glad that you are. But Elsie and I are Frank Merriwell's old-time friends. We know just how brave and skilful he is. We have seen him in many contests and in many places of danger. It would be strange if we didn't pin our faith to him. Don't you think so, dear?"

"I only wish that he and Buck were friends!" said Winnie.

The band was blaring away and Paul Rains stepped toward the water with his pistol. Merriwell entered one of the canoes, dipped skilfully, and sent the canoe from the shore at a leap.

"Isn't he a beautiful canoeist?" Inza declared.

"Oh, yes; he's very beautiful!" sighed Dismal Jones. "More beautiful than the lilies that decked Solomon's temple. I love beauty."

"You're the beast!" laughed Inza. "You must be, or you couldn't talk that way!"

Buck Badger entered the other canoe and shot it away from the shore. The water was at the moment almost as smooth as glass, and for the pure enjoyment of it Frank and Badger paddled round for awhile, exhibiting various feats of canoeing skill. Merriwell had not had a canoe paddle in his hand for a long time, but he seemed as strong and skilful a rower as if he had been in constant training.

"This makes me think of Moosehead Lake and my Indian guide," was his thought, as his mind went back to the spruce and pine forests of Maine, and to the great lakes enclosed within them. "If Paul Rains wants to make a real sensation out of his water show, he ought to get a Moosehead guide and a big bull moose and have the moose tow the guide in a canoe across an arm of this water."

Merry and some of his friends had been so towed by a moose, and, as exciting sport, it was far ahead of

anything that Paul Rains was likely to evolve there in civilized New Haven.

"Ready!" Paul Rains warningly called.

The word brought Frank back from the lakes and pine forests, and he heard again the music of the band, saw the sea of faces in boats and on the shore, heard the calls and the shouting, and saw the encouraging glances of his friends.

"If Buck Badger pulls me out of the water it will be because Buck Badger is a better canoeist than I am!" was his determined conclusion, as he rounded the canoe in to the place where the boat waited in which sat the man who was to tie the canoes together.

"Ready!" Paul Rains again called, when the cable was fast to the sterns of the canoes and the paddles were in position to be dipped.

It was the secret wish of Rains' heart that Merry might be defeated in this contest, but his impassive face showed nothing of this as he stood with outstretched pistol to give the signal.

"Badger ought to do it," was his thought. "I've coached him and showed him enough. If he isn't able to, I believe I'll challenge Merry myself. Can I pull him out of the water? I believe I can. Of course I can!"

"Ready?" he asked again.

"All ready," said Frank.

"All ready," called Buck Badger.

Crack! The pistol-shot echoed over the water. Instantly Merriwell's paddle went down and he gave a

powerful stroke. But Buck Badger dipped his paddle at the same time and pulled with all his might. Badger had powerful arms and shoulders, and under their force the canoe paddle bent. The nose of his canoe started ahead and Merriwell was pulled backward. Paul Rains' face lighted with joy, and a tremendous cheer rose from the point where Buck Badger's friends and admirers had congregated.

"Pull him out of the water, Badger!" yelled Donald Pike.

"I should like to thee him dwown the wathcal!" lisped Lew Veazie.

"He'll beat him, all right," declared Gene Skelding. "See what knots of muscles are on Badger's shoulders and arms! He could pull a house down!"

"Mr. Frank Merriwell is done up this time!" was Morton Agnew's gloating conclusion. "I wonder he ventured to try Badger at that. He'll never live over the disgrace, for he simply exists on flattery. This, with the stigma of dishonor that has been put on him by Professor Browne, will just kill him!"

Not only did Agnew's face flush, but it took on a fiendish look of hate.

"I shouldn't care if both were drowned!" was the thought in the heart of Roland Packard. Packard hated Badger almost as much as he did Frank Merriwell, for Badger had choked him because he had suggested underhanded means to be used against Frank.

But these enemies of Frank Merriwell found that they

were crowing entirely too soon. The headway of Badger's canoe was checked the next moment, and it began to move the other way. The yell that rent the sky and drowned the notes of the band came now from the throats of Merriwell's friends, and their number was legion.

But Frank was not to have an easy victory over Buck Badger. At times it seemed he might not be able to boast a victory at all. Badger pulled until he was almost black in the face—pulled until his oar blade seemed about to snap in two. Twice he broke Merriwell's advantage and dragged Merry's canoe backward. But these moments of triumph were brief. Each time Frank quickly recovered what he had lost, and again pulled Badger's canoe through the water. Paul Rains gave Badger all the time that he dared; but when Frank fairly drew Badger ashore, he was compelled to award him the decision.

Then occurred a mishap that seemed destined to spoil the day for our friends and also for Badger. In making a turn in toward the shore, after the contest had ended, the canoes collided. The collision threw Badger into the water head first. He came up a moment later, and Frank Merriwell extended him a helping hand. To Frank's surprise, Badger refused it, and turned to swim ashore.

An Indian rowed out and secured the drifting and half-filled canoe. Merriwell leaped out of his own canoe as soon as he reached the landing and hurried to Badger.

"Don't speak to me!" Badger flashed, in a rage. "You

did that to add to my humiliation. Don't speak to me, please!"

Merriwell colored angrily.

"Very well, Badger. I shall not waste words on you. And if you want to believe that I would do a thing like that, I'll not go to the trouble of trying to convince you of your error."

CHAPTER XXII.

BADGER'S ANGER.

Buck Badger got into dry clothing as quickly as he could, and as soon as possible he left the waterside with Winnie Lee. Winnie was much distressed, for Buck was in a towering rage.

"I think you are entirely wrong in blaming Frank Merriwell for that collision," she gently protested.

"So you have turned on me, too!" he gasped, white with astonishment and anger.

"Not at all. You know that I wanted you to win. And I was sorry when you failed. But you were fairly beaten, though not easily beaten. I am sure there is not another man in Yale who could have given Mr. Merriwell such a tug as you did. There is a good deal of honor in that, if you can look at it right. But as for the collision, I saw it, and I'm sure it was a pure accident."

"You're a little goose!" snapped Buck. "Do you know what I think?"

Winnie's face had colored.

"That I am a goose, I suppose? You have just told me that."

"I think Frank Merriwell did that for the purpose of making a spectacular show of rescuing me! I reckon there ain't any other reason whatever. It's just like him to plan a thing like that. He wanted to show that he could not only defeat me, but that he could be very brave

and generous toward his adversary. He's always trying to make some such show of himself. If he can rescue somebody or do something of that kind and get his name in the papers as a little tin god, he's happy. And that's what he planned. But I wasn't being rescued in that heroic way just then—none whatever!"

"I think you are very much mistaken, Buck," Winnie insisted. "I know that you are."

"So you are going over to the Merriwell side of the fence?"

"No, I am simply trying to be just."

"Be just to me, first!"

"I try to be, Buck. You ought to know that. I have stood up for you through thick and thin."

"You wouldn't have so much trouble standing up for me if you weren't always in the company of people who are Merry's friends and my enemies."

"Even Frank Merriwell is not your enemy!" she asserted.

"And I know that he is!"

"He would be one of your best friends, if you would let him. He isn't going to run after you to get your friendship, of course!"

"He wouldn't get it if he did! I don't want his friendship. I wouldn't be one of Merriwell's flock, I allow, for a heap of money. No man can be a friend of Frank Merriwell, and continue to be his friend, unless he is willing to get down on his knees and scrub the dust off Merriwell's shoes. I've seen a few things, I reckon!"

"You are mistaken," Winnie once more insisted.

"And I allow if you keep on defending him I shall have to feel that you are one of Merriwell's flock!"

"I'm not of his flock, but I'm his friend. And his friends are my friends. I wish you were his friend, Buck!"

"Never!" said Badger, with compressed lips.

"When you come to know him better?"

"Never!" with a gesture of impatience. "And I'll thank you to stop singing his praises!"

Donald Pike, who had come to hate Frank Merriwell with great bitterness, was awaiting Badger's return in the Kansan's room.

"That was a dirty trick Merry did you!" said Pike.

"Don't talk to me!" Badger snarled, throwing himself into a chair.

His words with Winnie Lee were rankling in his heart even more than the acts of Frank Merriwell. He and Winnie had almost quarreled before they separated. To have Winnie stand up for Merriwell was gall and wormwood to the Westerner. He could hardly endure it.

"You'll be able to see that fellow in his true light by and by!" Pike asserted.

"Don't talk to me!" Badger again snarled. "I don't want to hear anything!"

Pike looked him coolly over.

"Turned yourself into one of your prairie rattlesnakes?" he questioned. "I hope you won't accumulate so much venom that you'll die of it. If you'd turn it

against your enemies, instead of against your friends, it would be more seemly."

"Whose room is this?" said Badger.

"Yours. And I'm your friend. I sha'n't go out of it unless you order me out. I say that Frank Merriwell did you a dirty trick this afternoon, and so do a lot more of the fellows. You don't want to hear me talk, but I'm going to, just the same. I've stood by you through thick and thin, and that entitles me to some privileges, Buck Badger!"

But it was not friendship for Buck Badger so much as hatred of Merriwell that was inspiring Donald Pike. His friendship for the Westerner was just now used as a cloak.

"Of course, you'll let it pass, just as you have let a lot of other things pass that no self-respecting man would. He knocked you into the water purposely, after defeating you."

"I don't want to discuss it, none whatever. I know what he did that for. He wanted to rescue me in lovely style, after defeating me. It would add to his glory!"

This construction of the accident had not occurred to Donald Pike, but he grasped at it.

"That was just the conclusion I reached. You may do as you please, Badger, but no man would tumble me out of a boat that way, before all those people, and not reckon with me for it afterward."

"I don't reckon I shall ever have anything further to do with the fellow!" said Badger. "I was a fool to go into that contest. But Rains overpersuaded me."

"I thought you could beat him!"

"So did I!" the Kansan frankly admitted. "I thought I could pull him right out of the water. He's been practising on the sly."

"He's always up to such tricks!" Pike declared. "I've watched him closely, and he is always doing something of that kind. He is as sly as a fox. He will fool round and make his opponent think he doesn't know a thing about a certain game or contest, and then he'll prove that he has been slyly training for that very thing all along. It was just so in this case."

"I know it!" growled Badger. "What's the use of going over it?"

"And yet you have often told me that Merriwell isn't underhanded! What do you call that?"

Badger was silent. His face was pale.

"What would you have me do?" he grumbled.

"Well, I'd pay him back in some way!"

"You want me to fight him?" the Westerner asked, slouching forward with his face gnarled and perplexed.

"I'd take a better course than that. I'd plan some way to hit him hard without any danger to myself!"

"I reckon I ain't a greaser!" snapped Badger.

"And you're going to let this thing pass?" Pike asked, his disappointment so great that he could not hide it. "I've always been your friend, Buck. But I can't be the friend of a man who is a coward!"

Badger lifted his heavy shoulders and showed his broad white teeth in an unpleasant way.

"I shall likely have some kind of a settlement with Mr.

Frank Merriwell. But when I do, I shall not strike him in the dark. You can do that kind of work if you want to, Pike. And you can howl coward all you like. To my mind, the fellow that strikes in the dark, that he may strike safely, is the worst kind of a coward. You're my friend, and I allow I've proved my friendship for you; but them's my sentiments. And if I lose your friendship by expressing them, I reckon I shall have to lose it! That's whatever!"

Donald Pike trembled visibly, though he tried to maintain his composure.

"Those are pretty words, Buck, for a man who has stood by you as I have!"

Something in the tone touched Badger's raging heart. He remembered the many times that Pike had befriended him.

"I beg your pardon for saying them, then!" he said. "I didn't mean more than half of it, I reckon! But I never could bear the greaser style of fighting. I shall remember Merriwell's trick. Don't ever let yourself forget that. But when I go against him, it will be all fair and aboveboard!"

"And get yourself knocked out!" said Pike.

"If I do, I'll take my medicine!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

BADGER'S NOBILITY.

Buck Badger knew that if he remained he would get into a quarrel with Donald Pike and likely say things to be afterward regretted. So he left the room and went down into the campus. He felt better to be out of doors. It was something like being on the wide plains with the stars shining down on him. If only the campus trees were gone and the buildings no longer obtruded, he would have felt better! Night had scarcely fallen, however. The lamps were beginning to wink, but they were poor imitations of the jewels hung by the great lapidary in the deep western sky.

Badger hardly noticed them, or where he was, or which way he was going. Nor did he know how long he walked, for that rage in his soul drove him heedlessly on. At length he stopped with a jerk. He had heard Frank Merriwell's name. Looking about, he saw that he was near a small summer-house, or arbor. Even though the time was so early in spring, the night was so pleasant that some persons had entered the summer-house. They were talking—and of Frank Merriwell.

Badger was about to turn away when he was again arrested by what was being said.

"I thought we would talk it over, for the sake of your opinion, and that you may understand just how I feel about it. Merriwell was brutishly intoxicated that

night, and that alarm-clock joke was a great insult. He has professed to be an intense stickler for honor, but you can see that he has no honor!"

There was an answer to this, in a lower tone. Badger recognized both voices. The first speaker was Professor Stafford Browne, and the other was the president of Yale. For a minute the Kansan was rooted to his tracks. He did not want to be an eavesdropper, but he seemed powerless to get away. His veins boiled, and the conflict that arose in his heart was something terrible. Never had he felt such a dislike of Frank as on that evening. His temper had been seething on leaving his room and Donald Pike.

Stafford Browne continued to talk, and the president to answer, and the words came clearly to Buck Badger. The Westerner realized that Merriwell's good name and his reputation for honor were at stake.

Once Badger tried to walk on.

"What is it to me?" he fiercely demanded of himself. "He ought to be disgraced! I'm under no obligation to help him! And it may mean a lot of trouble for me. It will get me into a snarl. I'm safe now. Why should I say a word for a man who has treated me as he has? I won't!"

Again he tried to walk on, and succeeded in taking a step or two. But those words floating to him stopped him and drew him back.

"I reckon if I want Merriwell disgraced at Yale, all I need to do is to pretend that I haven't heard anything

of this to-night. It will be dead easy. Why should I go up and tell these men that I've been eavesdropping."

Again he tried to tear himself from the spot. But he could not. At last he tremblingly approached the entrance to the summer-house, scraping his feet noisily to give warning of his advance. There was a movement within, the light was shifted, and the president appeared.

Badger's white face was not visible to the president, but the Westerner's shaky voice betrayed his agitation.

"I should like a few words with you," he said, as courteously as possible. Stafford Browne came to the door.

"Come in!" the president invited, and Badger followed them into the summer-house.

"I overheard your talk just now," he shakily confessed, "and I couldn't go on without saying a word. I didn't mean to listen, but I allow you were talking louder than you thought."

"I know you," said Browne. "You're one of the sophomores!"

The president also recognized Badger before the Kansan gave his name, and motioned him to a bench.

"I am anything but a friend of Frank Merriwell," Badger went on, after taking the seat. "But I reckon it wouldn't be the part of a man to allow even an enemy to be unjustly condemned. I heard what you said about Merriwell, and I know that he had nothing whatever to do with putting those alarm-clocks in the lecture-room."

"How do you know?" Stafford Browne asked, rather coldly.

"I know, because I put them there myself!"

There was a moment of painful silence.

"I'm not in that class, you know," Badger went on, gathering courage as he proceeded. "I did it just for a joke, and really didn't think how it would seem to the lecturer. I hope you will pardon me, when I say that I heard some of the juniors talking about your lectures, Professor Browne. They said you tired them out by talking so much over time!"

Browne's face reddened.

"So it came to me that it would be a good joke—and I was thinking of the juniors, rather than of you, when I did it! So I sneaked a lot of clocks out of some rooms and set them and hid them in the lecture-room. One of the clocks was Merriwell's, but Merry hadn't any hand in it, and knew nothing about it. That is the honest truth! And if I did any great wrong, I'm ready to suffer for it."

"But about the drunkenness?" Browne protested, hardly knowing what to say.

"Of course, you haven't heard of the action of the boat crews or you wouldn't ask that, professor. The boat crews have looked into the matter and have reached the conclusion that Merriwell drank drugged water in the boat-house, put there to injure him by some enemy, and they have turned the boat-keeper adrift because of it."

"No, I hadn't heard that," Browne admitted.

"Well, it is so. Several fellows are under suspicion, but no evidence can be obtained against them. I will acknowledge that some of Merriwell's friends are said to have suspected me—chiefly a fellow by the name of Bart Hodge. But I knew nothing about it, and I know nothing about it more than what I have told you."

The confession was so manly a one, and made with such naive candor, that it carried conviction even to the prejudiced heart of Stafford Browne.

The day following he came to Badger and extended his hand. And this is what he said:

"Mr. Badger, you are a noble fellow, or you could not have made that confession! I was very angry at you last night because you placed those clocks in the lecture-room. But I have felt differently since I have had a night to sleep over it and think about it. I have found that the story you told is true. And I am glad to take you by the hand. Mr. Badger, you have shown genuine nobility, and I think we can afford to overlook the matter of the clocks."

CHAPTER XXIV.

DUNNERWURST TROUBLED.

"Vrankie, vot vos der meaningness uf dis pusiness?" Hans Dunnerwurst tapped Merriwell gravely on the arm and put the question in so loud a whisper that it might have been heard at the other end of the hall.

"What business?" Merry asked.

"Apout Inza Purrach und Elsie Pellvood und Vinnie Lee. I hope you vill underattempt to explanation id to me. Do you expectorate dot dose young laities vill veel bleasantness mit demselufs ofer dot?"

Merriwell smiled in his genial way.

"What is troubling you now, Hans?" he asked, taking the arm of the Dutch boy and walking with him down the long hall.

Dunnerwurst's round moon face was very sober.

"Vos Elsie Pellvood pelong to you or vos she pelong to Inza Purrach?" Hans anxiously questioned.

"Well, they both belong to me in a sense, Hans, if that is what you mean."

"Dose curls pelong to you in more as two cents!" Hans earnestly declared.

"Elsie has seemed to be much interested in Bart lately, and Inza has been rather cold!" Frank observed, a queer little pain stabbing through his heart.

"Bud she vos gone packness on heem, alretty yet! You haf peen tolt dot?"

"You mean Elsie?"

"Und he vos preaking his heardt vide oben apout id. He vos nod haf der bower to hide in his sleefe. Dis whole business makes me troublesomeness in mine sleeb."

"I don't think Bart is breaking his heart very much. He seems to have turned his attention to Winnie Lee."

"Dot vos shoost a gameness dot he you vos blaying. Ton'd you seen how he valk aroundt mit his feed on der grount und his eyes in der atmosfraid? He vos trying to hite in his moud und keeb his sleefe shud. But he ton'd could foolishness me! He vos not affectionating dot Vinnie Lee, und she vos not affectionating heemseluf. Dey vos blaying a gameness vor der peneficial of dot Padger veller, ain'd id?"

"I didn't know before that you called yourself a mind-reader, Hans!" Merriwell laughingly remarked, as they turned at the end of the hall to walk back.

"You vos losing my abbetide ofer id! Der whole pusiness haf made a mess uf me! Und uf you couldt straighten me oudt, I vish, Vrankie, dot you voult doded id. Dose curls vos peen friendliness undo me ven I vos nod peen friendliness mit myseluf und nopotty, und id make you veel like veeping, vor der trouple dot I haf now. Dose curls make me sorriness vor myseluf! I couldt cry dheir eyes oudt, uf id woult do no good!"

"These things have to straighten themselves, Hans," said Merriwell, sympathizing with the distress of the honest fellow. "I am believing that everything will come round right by and by."

"Und dot is all I can bromise you?" Dunnerwurst pleaded.

"All I can promise now, Hans! I'm not a miracle-worker!"

Merriwell seemed really anxious to get away from Dunnerwurst; and he excused himself, when the stairway was reached, and went down into the campus. The words of the Dutch lad had stirred a torrent of feeling which he did not care to reveal.

Hans rolled on into Merry's room, where certain members of the "flock" had gathered. There were no tears in his eyes, but in his voice there was a dolorous note that sounded strangely out of place.

"What are you hanging your harp on the willows for, this evening?" asked Danny Griswold, who was one of the first to notice it.

"I vos nefer own a harb like an Idalian!" Hans declared. "Vot vos your meanness, alretty?"

"What was his meanness?" howled Bink Stubbs. "Everything imaginable. Go ask the police of New Haven!"

"And they will say that Bink Stubbs ought to have his portrait in the rogues' gallery!" Danny retorted.

"What are you weeping about, Dunnerwurst?" Bruce Browning rumbled, from the depths of an easy chair. "Those little runts never can talk plain United States."

"I vos veeping apout Part Hodge!"

"Somebody kick him out of the room, please!" urged Jack Diamond.

"Und dot Padger Puck!"

"Treason!" shouted Bink.

"Let's get a rope and hang him!" solemnly suggested Dismal Jones.

Hans gave a startled glance around.

"Vere vos der funniness dot I seen?" he gasped.

"Go on!" urged Browning. "What's the matter with Badger and Bart Hodge. Have they been fighting again?"

"Uf der vos no vighting peen it vill pe pecause I vos afraid uf each odher. Bode uf heem vos lofing Vinnie Lee at der same momention, und Part he vos preaking oudt his heart vor dot Elsie Pellvood, vot haf gone packness on me."

"Clear as mud, by gum!" drawled Ephraim Gallup.

"It's love that makes the world go round!" sang Danny.

"You go slow, or we'll tell Hans how you mashed yourself on Stella Stanley," Buck warned.

"It is extreme lightness in the frontal region which makes your head go round!" Danny retorted, taking out a cigarette and chewing on it. "You're always dipping in where there is no water!"

"Don't talk!" Bink snapped. "A fellow who is so light that a kite can lift him should sing low about lightness! Your head is nothing but a cork!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Browning. "We haven't heard Hans through yet!"

"Vos dot curl pelong to Part, or vos she pelong to Vrankie?"

"What cuc-cuc-curl are you tut-tut-tut-talking aboubaout?" asked Joe Gamp.

Gamp was in sober earnest, but Hans looked at him reproachfully.

"You vos understoodt my meanness! Dot Elsie Pellvood. Vos Part pelong to her or to Vrankie?"

"It don't do to trouble with other people's love-matters!" drawled Browning. "But if you want an opinion, I will say that I believe both of those girls are cracked on Merriwell, the lucky dog! Elsie doesn't care anything for Hodge!"

"She's too sensible a girl to fall in love with him!" put in Diamond.

"And Winnie Lee and Bart care nothing for each other, more than ordinary friendship. I take it that Badger and Miss Lee have had a row."

"And that isn't all of it," said Diamond, in answer to this statement made by Browning. "Bart is now paying court to Winnie Lee for the sole purpose of spiting Badger, and because he thinks it will enable him to repay Elsie for some fancied coldness. He used to call himself a girl-hater. Now he is beginning to feel that he is a masher!"

Hans Dunnerwurst looked hurt. He did not like the tone which Diamond used in speaking of Hodge. Browning lazily nodded his approval.

"As our good friend, Bill Higgins, would say, 'I think you are on the right trail.'"

"This is a world of heartache and weariness!" sighed Dismal. "It's too bad that plural marriages are pro-

hibited in these United States. But I'm willing to sacrifice myself by marrying one of those girls, just to relieve the situation. Merry can't have both of them. Jacob married both Rachel and Leah, but somehow people seem to be down on that sort of business now."

"Dear Dismal, don't join the runty crowd of jokers," Bruce begged.

"You marry one, Dud-Dismal, and hug-hanged if I won't mum-mum-mum-marry the other!" said Gamp. "Merriwell has bub-been acting tut-tut-tut-tarnal queer abub-baout that whole bub-bub-business lately. I dud-dud-dud-don't lul-like it, mum-myself!"

"And yet you told us once that in the singing-school days down in New Hampshire you used to have half a dozen girls on the string at the same time!" Danny reminded. Gamp looked confused.

"Mebby I was a lul-lying a little bub-bub-bit abub-baout that!"

"Vonce I veel sure dot Vrankie vos going to marry py dot Inza Purrach, und anodder times I vos sure dot he vos going to marry dot Elsie Pellvood, und now I vos nod sureness uf I vill marry anypoty!"

Dunnerwurst heaved a sigh that seemed to shake the room.

"We won't go to the funeral until there is a corpse," said Dismal. "He can marry whichever he wants, and be satisfied, whatever he does, for I don't really know I'll take the other. I like them both, myself. I shall be satisfied, whatever he does, for I don't really know which I like better."

"Same over here!" said Danny.

"Do you mean to intimate a belief that one of those young ladies would take you?" sniffed Bink.

Danny struck himself a blow on his expanded chest.

"Sure! Even Stella Stanley said she would marry me, if I had a million dollars!"

"I think we are all willing that Merry shall settle this matter to his own satisfaction and that of the young ladies!" said Diamond. "Only it does weary me to see Hodge bracing up to Elsie Bellwood."

"He vos nod accompanying himself mit her any longer!" grunted Hans.

"Well, we won't worry about Hodge," said Diamond, "and Merriwell is able to take care of himself."

CHAPTER XXV.

BUCK AND WINNIE.

The interest taken in rowing matters began to make things look rosy for the 'Varsity. Every day that the weather permitted there was a swarm of eights, fours, and singles on the water. Often there were forty boats out at the same time, with Yale crews bending to the oars. The crew-work in the gymnasium was still carried on, too, though not to the former extent. Here a coach watched the men on the machines, instructing, correcting, encouraging, quick to see faults, but as quick to give praise where praise was due.

On the water other coaches followed the crews, watching with practised and anxious eyes for any exhibition of weakness. And this had continued through foul weather as well as fair, sometimes, in the earlier months, with the air like ice. The dogged patience with which the crews practised for the honors of the 'Varsity was worthy of all praise.

Lately the coaches had been closely scanning the work of Buck Badger, which had been given a rather high place in their estimation through some words of commendation from Frank Merriwell, though Badger was not willing to believe that he was in the least indebted to Frank.

Though Badger was a strong and clever rower, the

very strength and heaviness of his massive shoulders tended to make him a little awkward at the oar. He had begun to feel this himself, and to fear that, after all, his chance of going to New London was not good. Nevertheless, he had hung to the work in his stubbornly persistent way.

Another thing that Badger had been earnestly training for was to become a first-class baseball pitcher. He longed, with a strange fierceness, to down Frank Merriwell in what was held to be the latter's specialty. He egotistically believed that this was possible, and he hugged the thought comfortingly to his heart.

"I sha'n't care if I fail to beat him as an oarsman, if I can only beat him in the pitcher's box," he had said to his friend Donald Pike. "That will be worth everything that it costs!"

This was the thought that had upheld him in his determination. All of a sudden, however, Badger had lost heart. A quarrel with Winnie Lee cast a shadow over the whole sky. Nor did it lessen his distress to feel that the blame of the quarrel rested with him.

At the conclusion of a canoe tug of war in which he and Frank Merriwell had engaged, through an accidental collision of the canoes Badger had been thrown into the water. He believed that Merriwell had purposely brought about the collision, and did not hesitate to say so. Winnie Lee, who had seen it, believed otherwise. In her warm-hearted, girlish way, she had defended Merriwell, and this was something Badger could not endure. The result of the quarrel on the way home, re-

newed with even greater bitterness later, was followed by an angry separation.

Badger had fled down the street that night as if pursued by the furies, and for long hours had wandered wildly over the city, while Winnie, in the seclusion of her room, wept bitter tears.

So, instead of being in one of the shells this bright afternoon, pulling at an oar, Badger walked scowlingly along the waterside, glancing now and then at some newcomers to see if Winnie Lee was with them.

"Of course, she thinks I'll crawl back and ask her pardon!" he grumbled, as he looked off over the water. "But I won't, none whatever! If she wants to sing the praises of Frank Merriwell, let her sing them, but not to me. That was a dirty trick of Merriwell's! I know a thing or two, and I know that he did it to humiliate me and to make a spectacular show of rescuing me after I'd tumbled into the water. But I wasn't being rescued, bet your life! Not by Merriwell!"

He did not know how hot his face was nor how furious were his glances.

"I reckon I shall have to visit Buster Kelley again and go into training to whip Hodge! I've a notion to try him, without training. I know I'm stronger, and I ought to have more science right now. He's meaner than Merriwell!"

Winnie Lee did not shed any tears in public. Instead, she appeared as light-hearted and smiling as ever, and she seemed even handsomer to the irate and disgruntled Kansan. Badger felt that Bart was meaner than Mer-

riwell, for Hodge had shortly afterward shown himself in public as Winnie Lee's escort.

"I'd like to beat his face in!" was Badger's thought. "How she can bear the presence of that fellow puzzles me! I allow she must be doing it to spite me!"

He stopped and snapped his white teeth together so quickly and viciously that he bit his tongue. Bart Hodge and Winnie Lee had separated themselves from a crowd of young people and were walking toward him along the water's edge.

"Did they see me, when they started this way?" he asked himself. "That looks to be a deliberate attempt to call my attention to them. Oh, I'll have to go up against that scoundrel again for all I'm worth! I can see that."

He turned quickly aside, determined not to meet the saunterers, whose manner was so like that of lovers that it drove him frantic. Winnie Lee saw Badger and tugged at Bart's arm.

"Let's go down this way!" she urged. "There's B— Mr. Badger over there, and I don't care to meet him!"

"We'll not meet him!" said Bart, with a grim smile. "I saw him awhile ago. He's turned the other way now, you'll notice. He doesn't want to meet us any more than you want to meet him."

Winnie removed her hand from his arm, and he saw that it trembled. He observed, too, the unnatural pallor of her cheeks.

"I wonder what he thinks about it?" she anxiously queried.

"Well, I can guess that he would like to punch my head! He isn't getting as much satisfaction out of this as we are! Anyway, not as much as I am! I'm not so sure about you, Miss Lee?"

"You may call me Winnie!" she urged, as the color rushed back into her face.

He found her a seat and they sat down together, with their backs in the direction taken by Buck Badger.

"You're too pretty a girl for Badger," he observed, looking at her with admiration, for she had never seemed handsomer than at that moment. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were shining like stars.

"Don't flatter!" she begged.

"I'm not flattering. I mean just what I say. You're entirely too pretty and too nice a girl for Buck Badger."

"Shall I repeat what you say to Elsie?" she asked, glancing over her shoulder in the direction taken by Buck in a way to show that her heart was not in her light words. Hodge's face clouded.

"I don't know that I need to care what you say to her. I've found out, as I ought to have known long ago, that she doesn't care anything for me, and does care a great deal for Frank Merriwell. I did know it, but I refused to see it. You understand how that can be?"

"I thought they were engaged?" she questioned.

"Well, they were almost engaged. She felt that he belonged to her, and he felt bound to her in a sense. But I can't tell what has been the matter lately. You will remember that he paid a great deal of attention to Inza

when she came here to New Haven. About the time she presented him with those winged skates."

"Don't you know that he did that to please me?" she asked.

"Perhaps; but I think he was pleasing himself as much as anybody."

"Inza didn't seem to know that I had any claims on Buck, and she was with him all the time, nearly, and I asked Frank to be extra nice to her and win her away from Buck."

"And Elsie found that he had been paying court to Inza, when she came, and there was at once a coldness. That is the way it looks on the surface."

Winnie cast another anxious glance over her shoulder.

"Are you expecting Badger to come back?" Bart queried, a shade of annoyance on his dark face.

That question went unanswered.

"Do you know why I like you?" she asked, with girlish candor. Bart stared.

"It is because you look like Buck! Oh, you needn't scowl and get angry. It's true, every word of it. You look a good deal like him."

"Well, I am not like him!" Bart protested.

"And I think you are somewhat like him! And that is very high praise from me, Bart; for in spite of our quarrel, I still like Buck Badger better than any other man. It doesn't hurt you for me to say that, does it? It shouldn't, for you understand that we are simply playing a little flirtation game to teach him a lesson."

"I understand that," Bart grumbled, in a tone which

showed that he did not relish the reminder. "And Elsie was just playing a little game with me for the benefit of Merriwell, it seems!"

"'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women in it merely players!'" she quoted.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BADGER'S FALL.

Buck Badger came back to the waterside by and by, drawn as if by a magnet. He could not remain away. He was trying to convince himself that he would never again speak to Winnie Lee, and at the same time he was almost hoping for an opportunity. He wanted to see if she continued in the company of Bart Hodge.

He found Bart and Winnie in the midst of a laughing group, of which Frank Merriwell was the center. The lightness of Winnie's laugh smote him to the soul.

"Somehow, I feel as onery and mean as a coyote sneaking round a herd of sheep," he muttered, and when he drew a hand across his eyes he found upon it a strange moisture.

"I'm a fool!" he thought, again hardening his heart. "If Winnie doesn't care anything for me, why should I care anything for her? There are other fish in the sea!"

It tortured him to look at that laughing group, and, besides, he did not want to seem to be noticing them, so he turned again and walked away.

He did not return to the spot for nearly an hour. In the meantime he had tried to interest himself in the practise of the crews and in the ever-changing scenes of the water-front. He had not succeeded, however.

"I reckon I am hard hit!" he was forced to admit. "But I can fight it down, all right. And I'll do it!"

The laughing group had disappeared.

"Gone back home," was his thought. "I allow I'd better do the same, for it is getting late!"

He turned an angle and saw before him Bart Hodge and Winnie. A gurgling exclamation of rage came into his throat, but he choked it down. The heads of the youth and the girl were close together, and Winnie's sun umbrella sheltered both. Bart and Winnie were talking of Donald Pike, whose influence on Buck Badger she believed to be bad.

"I thought a good deal of him once," Buck heard her say, "but I fairly hate him now. I have made up my mind never to speak to him again."

Buck Badger's heart seemed to turn to ice. He was sure Winnie spoke of him. The fiery flush that had been in his face most of the afternoon faded out, leaving it an ashy gray.

"So she hates me now!" he muttered. "She will never speak to me again! Well, she don't need to!"

He turned softly on his heel and hastened away. When screened by the angle he seemed fairly to run.

"She hates me and she will never speak to me again!" was the cry that rang in his heart. "I'm sure I shall never ask her to!"

It was nearly nine o'clock at night before the Westerner approached his room. He came slowly up through the campus, the glare of the lamps making his face seem a ghastly white. He had intended to mount to his room, and, if he found Pike there, have a talk with him. But when half-way across the campus his heart failed.

"Pike can't understand this," was his conclusion. "And what good will it do to talk about it? Talking can't help a thing like this. Nothing whatever can help it, I reckon! The only thing to do is to drown it!"

He had been engaged in a fierce contest with himself ever since his misunderstanding of Winnie's words. Her declaration that she hated him and meant never to speak to him again seemed to raise between them an impenetrable barrier. Though he had been telling himself all the afternoon that such a barrier already existed, in his secret heart he had been hoping for a reconciliation. That hope was now gone.

Though he had no real love for liquor, Badger's fight had been to keep himself from plunging into wild dissipation in an effort to drown thought. He had believed the battle fought out and won as he approached the campus, but it was lost in the moment when he decided that it would be worse than useless to tell his troubles to Donald Pike. Now he deliberately turned his back on his room and on the campus and set out for a saloon in the lower part of the city.

"What's the use?" he argued. "Everything has gone to pieces! Let them go! Of course, I'll lose my chance for the 'Varsity, and my chance for that place in the pitcher's box, and I may even have to go back to the ranch. But what's the odds? None whatever! Let them go!"

He pulled his hat over his eyes and thrust up his heavy shoulders. He disdained street-cars and cabs. He did not want to see any one or speak to any one.

Though he had been walking for hours, he did not feel fatigued, but strode on, with a gait that slouched as he passed into the disreputable portion of the city.

"I reckon a fellow might as well take his fling! I don't know that I want to stay in Yale any longer, anyhow. Let the coaches howl. I sha'n't pull another oar, I allow. And I'd just as soon go West as not. If the old man makes a kick, I can pull my traps for some other place!"

If Badger had come in contact with Bart Hodge at that moment, a fight would have taken place instantly. He felt more bitter against Hodge than against Merriwell, and his hatred of Merriwell had been for a time almost consuming.

"A girl that will make up to such a fellow as Hodge isn't worth worrying over! And I'll not worry over her. I'll put myself where she will never see me again, and that will settle it!"

In imagination he was already packing his trunk for the West. He saw himself leaving Yale without a word of regret. He felt that he would be glad to get away. He did not care much where he went; but just to get away, away—anywhere, so that he could lose himself and obtain forgetfulness. To-night he would obtain forgetfulness by filling up with liquor.

In spite of his desperation, a feeling of shame came to him as he pushed his way into the dive toward which his steps had been directed. He had been there before, and he had promised himself that he would never go there another time. He had taken a mental pledge not to touch

liquor again. He did not care for drink—had never cared for it. Yet here he was, as wild for a taste of the fiery stuff as if he were a confirmed toper. A number of rough-looking men were about the sloppy bar. Badger shunned these and turned toward a small room in which he had been before. He did not return the nod of recognition which the barkeeper flung at him.

"None of the boys will be down here, I reckon," he mused, as he seated himself before the small table. Then the barkeeper stood before him.

"Anything I can do for you?" he asked.

"Whisky!" commanded Badger, not caring to waste words. It was placed before him and he began to drink.

"Who is dat chap?" one of the men asked of the barkeeper, jerking a finger toward the room into which the Westerner had disappeared.

"One of them collige fellers, I think. He comes down here for a booze sometimes. He allus asks fer whisky first. By and by he'll begin to call fer mixed drinks. Oh, he's a terror when he gits started!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

Barney Larney Lynn, the discharged boat-keeper, slouched through the wet fog along the shore. He did not care much for the loss of his position, which had brought little reward, but the suspicion which had been directed against him made him uneasy. But such uneasiness never brings about a reformation, for a reformation comes from within.

"I'll have to keep my peepers open, for I don't care to have any cop put his nippers on me!" was his thought. "I'll need to lay low awhile and be extry good!"

He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and shivered, for the air was chill; then shambled on, with his shoulders bent, a ghostly figure in the semigloom and bearing a strange resemblance to a gigantic frog.

Suddenly he stopped and ducked down out of sight. He had heard footsteps which were as shambling as his own. The time was early morning, shortly before sunrise, and Lynn, from his familiarity with the place, had expected no one in that vicinity at that hour. From his place of concealment he saw a young fellow stagger into view. The hands of the youth were also thrust deep into his pockets, his shoulders were humped, and his gait was uncertain and rolling.

"Mebbe one of the boys," muttered Lynn. "Don't look like it, though!"

Lynn was more puzzled as the shadowy figure drew nearer.

"One of them college chaps," he whispered. "Can't be! Yes, it is. And I know him, too! It's Buck Badger!"

At that moment a variety of conflicting emotions filled the breast of the disreputable boat-keeper. Chief among these was a feeling of hate coupled with a desire for revenge. Next to these was an itching greed, that made him wonder if Badger had any money with him. Being in the confidence of Roland Packard, Lynn knew that Buck Badger had been violently opposed to the underhanded attempts made against the reputation and honor of Frank Merriwell. Badger had fairly choked Roland black in the face for suggesting that he should take part in one of those attempts. For this reason, the boat-keeper had come to look on the Kansan as one of Merriwell's friends. But not for that alone did he hate Badger. The Westerner had been curt and harsh in some of his utterances to Lynn; and these curt words, coupled with an instinctive feeling that Badger did not like him, had filled him with anger.

"I'd like to get his little wad!" thought Lynn, as Badger lurched by. "He's got as big a load on as he can carry. That ought to be easy, if he has anything with him. Yes, he ought to be dead easy, for he's loaded to the guards!"

With this thought, he followed Badger, as soon as the latter was past his hiding-place.

"Hello!" he said, with an attempt at jocular familiar-

ity. "Out a bit early, ain't ye? Nasty fog comin' in off the bay this morning!"

Badger checked his rolling gait. He did not recognize Lynn, nor did he object when Lynn took him by the arm.

"Where goin'?" Lynn questioned.

The Westerner stopped and looked at him with owl-like gravity.

"'Scursion down here this mornin', my frien'! Goin' on that 'scursion. Come down—hic!—early, so t' be sure not to miss it. Wouldn't m-miss that fer anything whatever. No, sir!"

The light of comprehension broke in upon Barney Lynn.

"Sure!" he exclaimed. "I know about that excursion. Merriwell's party, on the little steamer *Crested Foam!* Sure! I know all about that! It is to be to-day, that's a fact, though it had slipped my memory. I belong on that steamer!"

The Westerner stopped short and took him by the arm.

"L-look here! 'F you know wh-where that boat is, I reckon I can make it int'restin' fer you!"

He thrust a hand deep into a pocket of his trousers and brought to view some crumpled bills. He pulled them apart. They were a one and a five. Barney Lynn's greedy eyes shone as he looked on the money. He thought there might be more where that came from.

"I can take you to where she's lying, right now!"

Lynn declared. "But she won't drop down the bay for a good while. 'Tain't hardly day yet!"

"Shay," said the Westerner, fishing up another crumpled bill, "I like you! You're frien' of mine! That 'scursion-boat goin' this mornin' sure?"

"Sure!" said Lynn, tempted to snatch the bills from Badger's fingers, but holding his desire in check. "Going early. Arrangements made two or three days ago. I know all about it. And I can help you."

"You're frien' of mine!" Badger repeated, putting the bills into the hands of Lynn. "I can trust you."

"Sure!" Lynn eagerely declared. "You can trust me with every dollar you've got. And I'll help you in any way that you want me to."

He was wondering why Badger did not try to go with the regular party. The *Crested Foam* was a small steamer much used by excursion-parties desiring an outing in the bay, and Merriwell and his friends had chartered her some days before for that purpose, a fact of which Lynn was aware. But Lynn had lied when he said he was employed on the *Crested Foam.*

"Young lady frien' of mine going in that party," Badger owlishly explained, while he steadied himself by clinging to Lynn's arm. "Merriwell—— You know Merriwell?"

"Don't anybody know him much better!" Lynn growled.

"Merriwell's grand scoundrel!" said Badger. "You know Bart Hodge?"

"Sure!"

"'Nother grand scoundrel! Bigger scoundrel 'n' Merriwell! Goin' t' whip him first time I meet him!"

"But I thought you was a friend of Merriwell," Lynn ventured.

"Tha'sh a lie!" the Westerner fiercely declared. "Wouldn't b'long to Merriwell's flock for money. Merriwell's grand scoundrel. Goin' t' lick Bart Hodge first time I meet him! You goin' on that 'scursion-boat?"

"I'll take you there," Lynn promised. "I belong on her."

He took Badger's arm and started with him along the waterside.

Suddenly Badger stopped.

"S'lect party goin' on that boat, y' know! Ain't got no inv'tation whatever, I ain't. But I'm goin' anyhow. 'F you can work that for me, I'm yer frien'! Young lady frien' of mine goin' in that party!"

"Oh, I can work it!" Lynn glibly promised.

The desire to be near Winnie Lee was the thing that was uppermost in the drink-muddled brain of the Kansan. It was this that had drawn him down to the wharves at that unseemly hour. Barney Lynn's chief thought was to lure him aboard the *Crested Foam,* or into some dark place, and rob him, if it could be safely done. As he walked on again with Badger, he tried to thrust a hand into one of Badger's pockets.

"Shay, my frien'!" Badger fiercely growled. "No frien' of mine tries to put his han's into my pockets. No frien' of mine, I reckon, 'f you try to do that!"

He stopped again, and looked Lynn over with owlish gravity.

"B'li've I know you," he asserted, in a suspicious way. "B-b-'li've I know you!"

"If you do, you know that I'm all right!" Lynn assured, his voice shaky with anxiety. "You was mistaken about me tryin' to put my hand into your pocket. I wouldn't do such a thing."

"Better not!" Badger warned.

"I'll have to handle him with gloves," was the boat-keeper's reflection. "If he gets suspicious, he'll slip through my fingers. I wish I knew if he has any more money. If I thought he hadn't I'd drop him quick."

Aloud he said:

"You want me to get you aboard of that boat, I suppose?"

"Tha'sh what I want. And 'f you can, I'll make it int'restin' fer ye. My old man sent me a wad las' week."

He stopped and began to feel in another pocket.

"C-can't find it," he grumbled. "But there, all r-right! 'S'there, all right!"

"Well, I'm just the man you've been huntin' for," said Lynn. "I can get you aboard that boat, and you can go on that excursion, if you haven't any invitation! Sure thing!"

"M-make it int'restin' fer you, if you can," Badger drunkenly promised.

"I can, all right. Come on!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN THE HOLD OF THE "CRESTED FOAM."

The accusations brought recently against Lynn tended to make him nervous and wary. In the Westerner's state of intoxication, Lynn might have knocked him down and robbed him, or taken his money by force, but he felt that either of these courses was too risky. Badger might remember it, and bring about his arrest, and that was a thing the boatman very much desired to avoid.

Day began to break, but the fog was still thick. Forms began to move about in the increasing light. Barney Lynn carefully avoided these.

"If I can get him on the boat and get his money away, I'll be all right. He will not remember how much he paid me, and I can deny that he paid me more than the thing was worth. And there ain't anything criminal in puttin' a fellow aboard a boat that he wants to go on. Couldn't make any State's prison case out of it, anyway!"

A steamer loomed into view. It was the *Crested Foam.* She was lying at the dock, but there were no signs of life about her."

"There's yer boat!" said Lynn, pointing the steamer out through the fog. "That's the *Crested Foam.* But I want a drink of water before I go any farther. Mebbe you'd like a drink, too!"

"Don't want any more redeye!" Badger protested. "Stuff makes me sick!"

"No, just some water. You wait here a minute."

"'S'all right!" agreed the Kansan. "You're my frien'. I'll w-wait fer ye."

Barney Lynn knew of a pump not far away. He almost ran, in his haste to reach it. He broke loose the tin dipper attached to the pump by a chain, and partly filled it with water. Then he took out a little bottle containing a small quantity of white powder. It was what was left of the villainous stuff given to him by Morton Agnew with which to drug Merriwell.

"He hasn't recognized me yet, I'm almost certain. After he downs this he wouldn't know his grandmother from an apple-tree. I'll get him on that boat and swipe his money, and then clear out. The thing ought to be perfectly safe, and if there is a fellow in New Haven who needs a wad just now more than I do I'm sorry for him!"

Badger was resting on a piece of timber when Lynn returned with the drugged water in the dipper.

"That's good stuff!" Lynn declared, smacking his lips as if he had just enjoyed a refreshing drink. "It'll make you feel better. Take a good swallow of it."

The Kansan spilled some of it in his efforts to drink from the dipper, but he swallowed a goodly quantity of the drug, anyway. Barney Lynn's heart thrilled with triumph.

"I've got him!" he thought. "Now, if he only has enough money to pay me for it!"

He did not suggest that they should immediately go aboard the boat. He began to wonder if it would be at

all needful. But the brightening of the sky and the increased signs of life on the water-front told him that delays were dangerous.

"We'd better be going!" he whispered, at last. "If we don't, likely we can't get aboard."

Badger straightened up. His head had been drooping, but the drug had not yet taken effect, and the boat-keeper's words aroused him. Lynn took him by the arm and steered him toward the small excursion steamer, warily watching for any signs of life aboard of it. He knew the steamer well, for he had once worked on it.

"Whoever is aboard is asleep," was his conclusion. "I'll just slip down into the forward hold with him, and get his wad and then slide. He'll not come out of this, after it once gets a grip on him, for a good while; but it's too light to fool with him longer. If I'm seen I'll just say that he wanted me to bring him aboard."

"This the 'scursion boat?" Badger demanded, drawing back at the last moment. Lynn was irritated.

"Sure!" he whispered. "But keep your trap shut. I can't get you aboard if you don't keep still. I'm trying to help you, you know, and you must do as I say."

"'Scuse me!" said the Kansan. "You are frien' of mine. Anyshing you say goes!"

"Then come along without any fuss! This is the boat, and I know what I'm about. We'll be safe enough in another minute."

Then he assisted Badger from the landing to the boat, which was only a step, and hurried him to a stairway, by which he knew he could make his way into the forward

hold. It took caution and time to get into the hold by the passage which led from the cabin and engine-room, but when the hold was gained Lynn found there some casks behind which he might hide if necessary, and some waste which would make a soft bed to lie on.

"Drop down here and keep still awhile, and you're all right!" he whispered to Badger. "We haven't been seen by a soul!"

Badger was beginning to feel drowsy, and he obeyed. Lynn tried to thrust a hand into one of the Kansan's pockets. But Badger was still too wide-awake for that. He seemed to be fearing something of the kind, and straightened up with an angry growl.

"None o' that!" he warned. "'F you're frien' o' mine, you'll keep your han's to yerself!"

"Sure!" said Lynn. "I wasn't trying to dip into your pockets. Haven't I proved my friendship? I've brought you aboard, as I agreed; but you haven't paid me!"

Badger propped his back against one of the casks, and, after feeling round in one of his pockets, drew out a five-dollar bill, which he passed over to Lynn. The sight of it made Lynn more greedy for the rest.

"That isn't enough!" he urged. "I've taken a lot of risk in this business. And I must be going! It's daylight now, ye know!"

"Tha's pay a-plenty!" grumbled Badger. Then he dropped down on the waste again.

Barney Lynn got out of the hold and tiptoed toward the companionway. No one on the boat was stirring. When he returned Badger had apparently fallen into deep

sleep. Lynn feared, however, to make any movement toward the pockets, and sat staring at the Westerner, anxious and nervous, and with a heart filled with greed.

At last he put forth a hand. The drug was taking effect, and Badger did not arouse himself. Softly the boatman searched pocket after pocket. There were bills in nearly all of them, but none of large denominations. He could hardly see down there in the gloom of the hold. His anxiety made him venture to strike a match. By its flickering light he quickly looked the money over.

"Not quite fifty dollars!" he muttered, somewhat disappointed. "Wonder what's become of the wad which the old man sent him? He's been throwing it away, of course. But this ain't so bad, for one night. And the thing is safe, the way I've worked it. Now I must slide."

But as he turned to leave the insensible Kansan, he heard footsteps on the deck of the vessel. Some one had come aboard. Voices reached him, too.

He crawled stealthily out for the purpose of taking a look. He did not dare to thrust his head above the deck, but he was able to see that the fog was rapidly rolling away, and that the light had greatly increased. He realized that it would be impossible for him to escape now unnoticed. He crept back into the forward hold, swearing savagely and silently.

"I suppose that fool won't stay long," he thought. "If he does, I'm in a box. And it's getting lighter every minute! How am I to get ashore?"

He was not willing to make a dash for it, for he felt

sure he would be recognized, and that arrest would soon follow. Above all things, he feared the police and the police courts.

"Mebbe I can drop overboard without being seen," he reflected, as he lay nervously down on the waste by the side of Badger. "There ought to be a boat near that I could drop into. But perhaps that fellow won't stay long. I wonder who he is talking to?"

The excursion steamer seemed waking into life.

"Heavens! I hadn't thought of that! Somebody may come down here any minute. It won't do for them to see him any more than me!"

He cast about, wondering what he could do to secure his safety. Finally, as the best thing, he grasped Badger by the shoulders and drew him into the darkest part of the forward hold, piling some of the waste over him, and then he crawled in by Badger's side.

"Couldn't be safer!" he thought. "I can put some of the waste over me, if anybody comes down. I can crawl back here in a minute!"

He began to feel better.

"That fool won't know anything for a good while. And before he comes round I'll find some way to get off the boat. I don't intend to go on that excursion myself!"

But Barney Lynn did go on that excursion.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MESHED IN HIS OWN WEB.

Paul Rains, who was a member of Merriwell's excursion-party, was the first to come aboard the steamer.

"A bit early," he remarked to the fussy captain who greeted him, glancing at his watch. "Well, I'll walk up and down the deck awhile. We ought to have a pleasant time to-day. The fog is gone, and you've got a pretty sheet of water out there. Ah! I see friends are coming! I think I shall have to put a yacht on New Haven Bay!"

The friends who had come into view were Browning and Rattleton, accompanied by Danny Griswold and Bink Stubbs. Barney Lynn muttered curses that were deep, but not loud. He had not been able to escape from the steamer without detection, and was still in hiding in the hold with Buck Badger.

"This is a pretty layout!" he muttered. "I don't even dare to poke my head out. I've a big notion to make a run for it."

He crept again to the companionway and tried to get a look about the deck. But this was such a dangerous procedure that he crept back again. But he could not remain long in his hiding-place, even though every time he sallied out he was in such peril of discovery. He heard Browning and his companions come aboard, and heard the greetings which passed between them and Paul Rains. The scent of tobacco smoke came to his nostrils. Bruce

was pulling away at his pipe, and Danny was consuming cigarettes at a greedy rate.

"Thank goodness for that, anyway!" Lynn muttered. "I've been dying for a smoke, and didn't dare to burn a mite of tobacco for fear I'd be smelt out. But I'm all right along that line. I can live a week on tobacco, with nothin' to eat, and if I have to stay down here I can do it. I don't know about him, though!" glancing toward the hold where Badger was hidden. "He'll be coming out of that by and by and making a row. I don't want to have to knock him on the head. I guess I made a mistake coming aboard the boat. Ought to have worked it earlier!"

Regrets were useless, and he crept back into his hiding-place, where he set his pipe to going, and, lying back on the waste, tried to console himself and get comfort out of the weed.

On the deck above Paul Rains had started a conversation about sporting matters.

"Harvard will do you fellows up this season!" he remarked to Browning.

"Do you mean me and my friends, or Yale?"

"Do up Yale."

"Let your bife she won't!" Rattleton asserted.

"Well, I was up at Cambridge the other day and looked in on things there, and that's my judgment. If you had seen the work of the boat crews on the Charles River that I saw you'd think as I do. They're doing pretty work."

"Yell, isn't Wale doing pretty work? What's the matter with you? You've just got Crimson on the brain!"

"Time will tell!" said Rains serenely. "And their ball-team is a wonder."

"Have they got a pitcher that can stand up with Merry?"

"Yes, several of them! I've seen Merry pitch, you know!"

"But not lately," Browning reminded. "There he comes now, too!"

Merriwell and Hodge, Diamond and Dunnerwurst, and half a dozen more, came into view. In the party were Elsie and Inza, with Winnie Lee and her father, the Honorable Fairfax Lee. All were chatting gaily. If coming events cast their shadows before, it was not so that morning. There was no presentiment of peril, and in Winnie Lee's heart no feeling that Buck Badger was near.

Winnie was a girl who possessed in a wonderful degree the power to hide her heartaches under a mask of gaiety and lightness. She seemed even prettier than usual this morning as she stepped aboard the *Crested Foam* and looked about her. No one would have guessed that she had shed bitter tears for the Westerner the previous night, or that she had lain awake long hours brooding over her troubles.

Winnie Lee, with Inza Burrage and Elsie Bellwood, made a trio that would add brightness, life, and beauty to any gathering. They were all handsome girls, each in her own way.

"Now, this is my style of boating!" said Browning, with a sigh of lazy satisfaction, dropping into a camp-chair on the deck. "What is the use of tugging at an oar when you don't have to? That was all well enough in the days of Rome, before people knew anything about the power of steam! And you'll notice that even then the galley oar was usually tugged at by a slave. To-day, every civilized man must have the skill and brawn of a galley-slave or he isn't in it!"

It was a long speech for lazy Browning, but in it he so expressed his ideas of the eternal fitness of things that its length was not noticed.

"You'll die of fat and inertia!" laughed Merriwell.

"I'd rather die that way than to die of exhaustion!" Bruce retorted. "Life is short. What is the use of stewing it away with these everlasting sports and athletics?"

"I'm afraid that you haven't any true love of sports," said Rains. "Sports and athletics are my life. Why, they just build a fellow right up and make a man of him. They're life to me!"

"I'd rather have an easy chair and a good pipe!" drawled Bruce, too lazy to enter into a discussion of the question.

The steamer whistle screeched hoarsely.

"We're off!" said Inza, her dark eyes shining with delight.

Down in the darkness of the forward hold Barney Lynn sat bolt upright. He had been expecting that sound, but when it came it made him shiver. For a moment he seemed about to leap toward the deck and

fight his way ashore if necessary. But he knew the decks were now crowded. The tramp of feet and the buzzing of voices had told him that. He could not break through without detection.

"If I just saunter out, mebbe I can make it!" he gasped, getting up and dropping his lighted pipe into his pocket. "I'll try it. I'll say that I went to sleep down here—anything, just to get by 'em. I can't stand it! I must get out!"

He still hesitated, however. Then he looked down at Badger, who was in the land of oblivion. He gave Badger a brutal kick.

"If it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't be here!" he fumed. "You wanted to get aboard this excursion boat. You're aboard, and I hope you're satisfied. You'll be a pretty duck, too, when yer friends find you!"

He tore himself from the spot with a savage snarl, like that of a wild animal, and rushed toward the companion-ladder. But he was too late. Even as he put himself in motion he felt the little steamer draw away from the dock. He was familiar enough with the movement to know just what was taking place, and he knew, too, that before he could gain the deck and spring overboard a dozen yards would separate him from the landing.

He drew back, half-heartedly, for Barney Lynn was a coward; and in that moment of hesitation his chance of leaving the boat passed away. Standing thus in indecision, though feeling that he ought to act, he heard the puffing of the steamer, and caught the sounds from the

engine-room which told him of the work of the engineer and stoker. Then he crept back into the forehold and sank down on the waste with almost a feeling of despair.

"If I'm caught down here, I'll say that I crept down for a snooze in the night and didn't wake up till after the steamer started. That wouldn't be so strange, for I've been working on the boat before. I think that would go. Yes, that's what I'll tell. As fer him," kicking savagely at Badger, "let him string his own story. If they find us, I don't know him! That's what I'll say. I don't know him and don't know how he got down here!"

He listened a little while.

"Well, we're off! I wonder how long they'll be out? Mebbe we can keep snug down here till the excursion ends."

Then he again stuck his pie into his mouth and began to smoke cautiously.

CHAPTER XXX.

OVER A VOLCANO.

"Give us a song, Diamond," said Merriwell, as the steamer began to feel the heaving of the bay.

"If you will help me," answered Jack, who had a beautiful tenor voice. Then he sang:

"Bounding so merrily over the sea,
Speeding us onward so gay;
Leaving behind us all sorrow and care,
We will be happy to-day.

"Sailing o'er billows all covered with foam,
Dashing the waters on high;
Sea-gulls are skimming the waters of blue,
Screaming as onward they fly.

"Pleasure comes not for to-morrow alone,
Let us be merry to-day;
Fling to the winds every sorrow and care,
While we are speeding away."

If Buck Badger had been in condition to hear and comprehend, his heart would have been crushed, for Winnie Lee lifted her voice like a bird. There was in it no suggestion of grief or distress. No one could have seemed happier. But the Kansan did not hear and know.

Other songs followed, grave and gay, comic and sentimental. A jollier party seldom sailed the bay. The Honorable Fairfax Lee enjoyed it all as if he were a boy again. He laughed and joked, and sang when he could, with his eyes fixed on the face of the daughter he

loved. But the Honorable Fairfax Lee did not know the thoughts of his daughter's heart.

Though a strong breeze came in from the Sound, the girls did not choose to retire into the cabin, but drew their wraps about their shoulders and remained on deck until Frank Merriwell announced that it was time for hungry people to think of eating something. Then the whole party trooped below and gathered round the table which had been placed for this particular occasion.

Paul Rains, as a fellow with money to burn, had insisted on being permitted to share with Merriwell the expense of the excursion and of the table; and he was very proud now of his rôle as host, as he drew up his chair and beamed over the jolly company.

"I don't know but there are better opportunities at Yale than at Fardale, Merriwell, for real pleasure," he declared. "I know I have never so enjoyed myself as to-day."

There was a frivolous note in the character of Rains, which caused him to delight in any form of gaiety, and the fact that the three pretty girls aboard the *Crested Foam* gave him a good deal of attention elated him to a considerable degree.

"I nun-nun-never had mum-more fun in a mum-mum-mum-month of Sundays!" stuttered Joe Gamp.

Even Browning has enjoyed himself!" said Bink.

"He always enjoys himself when he has nothing harder to do than to hold down a chair!" commented Danny Griswold.

Thus they laughingly gathered round the table. Men have been known to walk on the edges of volcanoes and not know it. Merriwell's friends were laughing and singing, joking and feasting on the edge of a volcano. A startling struggle was going on in the forward hold—a struggle between Barney Lynn and the fiend of fire.

Lynn had been careless, even reckless, in his smoking. Unobserved by him, a spark from his lighted pipe had caught in some of the waste. It smoldered awhile without attracting his attention. The odor of the tobacco filled his nostrils and kept him from noticing this new odor. Then the burning particles suddenly flared into a flame, and flashed through the waste as if the latter were tinder. Lynn threw himself on the fire in a desperate effort to stamp it out. He tried to wrap the burning waste in his coat, but this attempt seemed only to spread the flames. His coat began to burn, and the smoke grew stifling.

The *Crested Foam* had turned and was heading homeward. The wind had increased, and the waves were somewhat rough. But the captain had noticed that the members of Merriwell's jolly party were good sailors and did not mind a little tossing. Merriwell and his friends were feasting while Barney Lynn was fighting the fire.

"It's goin' to get away from me!" Lynn gasped, again beating at it and wondering if he ought to call for help.

But the cowardice which had kept him from trying to leap ashore still held him. He feared to reveal himself, even though he knew how dangerous the fire was in that place and so fed. A call from him would have

brought help at a time when help might have availed, but he did not send that call.

"They'll smell it pretty soon," he muttered. "I guess mebbe they can put it out with the hose after they smell it. I'd better be lookin' out for myself."

In looking out for himself it seemed to him needful to look out for Badger. He was almost delighted when he saw Badger stir and show signs of returning animation. The choking smoke got into the Kansan's lungs and set up a fit of coughing. This startled Lynn almost as much as the fire.

"It won't do to let him stay here and burn," he said to himself, trying to make himself feel that he was urged by humanitarian motives. "I'll have to drag him to some other place."

He stooped over and shook Badger heavily.

"Get up!" he urged, giving Badger a kick. "You'll burn to death in here. We've got to make a change. Get up! The boat's on fire!"

These last words seemed to penetrate to the muddled and numbed brain of the Westerner. He stirred, and when Lynn took hold of his arm he tried to get up. He opened his eyes and stared around, but did not seem to recognize Lynn or to have any clear perception of where he was or what had befallen him.

"Come!" urged Lynn. "Can you walk? For I don't know if I can carry you. There's a place, smaller than this, toward the stern, where we can hide awhile. This whole thing is going up in smoke, if we don't get

out. P'r'aps I can open something to make them know what's going on!"

Badger yielded to the words and movements of Barney Lynn, and the latter, lifting and dragging at him, got him out of the burning forehold and hurried him as fast as he could toward that other place of hiding.

Luck was with Lynn. He was not seen by any one, or if seen, no heed was given to him. The fact that the boat was filled with excursionists who had penetrated on unsteady feet to the engine-room and to other parts of the vessel was of itself enough to keep the few members of the crew from looking too closely at any one lurching along a passage.

"This is all right," he observed, looking around in the darkness as well as he could and letting Badger slide to the floor. "Now, if they'll just tackle that fire! I ought to give an alarm, I s'pose, but they are bound to smell it soon. I can smell it back here. I wonder the fellers in the engine-room don't drop to it, but the smell of oil is so thick in there likely they can't smell anything else."

He was uneasy. He fancied he could hear the fire roaring. He was sure it would not go out of itself. He wanted to rush upon deck and scream "Fire!" but he did not dare to.

"The old boat will burn down before they know there's any danger," he muttered, straining to listen. "Hear them kids laughin' and singin'! Won't nobody ever get a whiff of that smoke?"

He twisted uneasily about and gave Badger a brutal kick.

"You're the cause of all this!" he snarled. "If it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't be here. You wanted to get on this boat, and now you're here, and p'r'aps it'll be hot enough for ye before you get off. A bit of a scorching would serve ye right!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

MERRIWELL TO THE FRONT.

"Fire!"

This cry, from the engine-room, startled the captain. He called back through the speaking-tube; then, after giving some nervous orders, he hurried down to see just what he had to contend with.

His eyes caught a flare of flame and his nostrils were assailed by a cloud of pungent smoke. The whole forward part of the vessel below decks seemed on fire. The fussy little captain was bewildered and frightened. However, he issued commands for fighting the fire and attempting to confine it to the forehold, and hastened toward the cabin, where the cry of fire and the odor of smoke had not penetrated.

Jack Ready was on his feet, proposing a toast, when the white and startled face of the captain appeared. Ready put down his glass and the facetious words died on his lips. He saw that the captain had unpleasant news to communicate.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the captain began, trying to control his excitement, "fire has been discovered in the fore part of the boat; but I think there is as yet no danger. We are trying to get it under control. If you will go on deck, however, perhaps you will feel better, if you are no safer! We have plenty of boats and plenty of life-preservers, so there is no danger!"

Chairs were instantly pushed back and a stampede began for the cabin door, for there are few things more alarming than a knowledge that the boat which bears you is on fire. But Merriwell's words served to bring order out of the confusion.

"We have plenty of time," he cried sharply. "Let the ladies go first. Every gentleman is willing that the ladies shall go first."

He pushed the three girls toward the door.

"Show that you are brave!" he whispered.

"The color came again into Inza's cheeks, which had been very white. Lifting her head courageously and straightening her shapely shoulders, she looked every inch a queen. Elsie was of a different mold, but she seemed not a whit less inspired by Merriwell's words. If she felt fear she did not show it. And Winnie Lee seemed as brave as the bravest.

Fairfax Lee hurried to Winnie and caught her by the arm.

"That is all right!" said Merriwell, holding his friends back by his looks as well as by his words. "Let Mr. Lee go up with his daughter."

The stampede was stopped, and the entire party filed out of the cabin in an orderly manner and without danger of injury or loss of time. Less than five minutes later all were on the deck.

The captain was about to give orders for the closing of the companionways, and the battering down more tightly of the forward hatch, and Merriwell was on the point of volunteering the services of himself and his

friends for a fight against the fire below, when there was a flare of flame from a point near the bow. The fire had eaten a hole through the forward deck and now leaped upward with a roar.

The steamer had swung round and was heading toward the nearest point of land, when the engineer came rushing to the deck.

"We'll be roasted if we stay down there!" he gasped, while his eyes rolled wildly. "I never saw fire spread so. It seemed to jump right into the engine-room."

The captain looked toward Merriwell as if for advice.

"Somebody should stay by the engines till the last gasp!" he said.

"Go below!" the captain shouted. "We've got to save the boat, if we can. Go back to your place!"

The engineer disappeared.

"We can keep the fire under, until we can reach land," Merriwell suggested. The captain called for volunteers to fight the fire, while the engine whistle began to sound its hoarse and ominous call for help.

Merriwell put himself in the forefront of the fire-fighters. Not only were the pumps brought into play, but a bucket brigade was quickly formed. There was no shirking on the part of any one. Paul Rains proved himself as heroic as Merriwell in this time of danger.

Very little time was needed, however, to show that their best efforts were destined to prove unavailing. So great a hold had the fire obtained, and so fiercely did it rage that no headway could be made against it. The

engineer appeared again, followed by the other members of the crew who had been below.

"Go back!" the captain commanded.

"Not if I know myself!" the engineer doggedly declared. "I ain't going to be burnt up down there. And I've stopped the engines. Shore's too far away to make it, and we'd best take to the boats!"

Merriwell saw that the engineer spoke truly. It was mere folly to waste further efforts in fighting the fire. The *Crested Foam* was doomed, and no power could save her. The proper thing to do was to make sure that no lives were lost when she went down or blew up.

"We have plenty of time!" Frank declared, quietly addressing the girls, who, he saw, were becoming frightened in spite of their attempt to remain calm. "The boats can take us off. The first thing to do is to put on life-preservers."

He reached out to get some life-preservers that were stowed beneath one of the boats on the deck. As he did so, the engineer and the others who had rushed up from below leaped toward the boat, evidently with the intention of launching it and thus making sure of their own safety. The cowardice of the movement irritated Frank beyond measure.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, striking the engineer a blow which knocked him backward. "If you haven't any manners, I'll teach you some!"

The engineer picked himself up with a savage growl, and his face darkened.

"Down with him!" he snarled.

But the firm hand of Bart Hodge fell on his shoulder.

"No, you don't!" Hodge warned. "If you and your friends make another break like that, we'll chuck you overboard!"

"That we will!" exclaimed Rains, stepping forward. The engineer fell back with white lips and shaking limbs.

"Here, Bart, pass these life-preservers round!" Merriwell commanded, handing the articles out to Hodge. "No one need get excited. We have plenty of time. The boat is losing speed, and we can get away from her without trouble."

He looked toward the captain, who was confused by the mutinous bearing of the engineer and his companions, and seemed not to know what to do.

"With your permission, my friends will lower the boats!" Frank suggested.

"Certainly! certainly!" said the captain. "I shall be glad to have them do so."

"Browning, you and some of the others lower a boat on the starboard side. Diamond, you and others lower one on the port side. I'll pass out the life-preservers. Just keep cool. We have plenty of time."

The girls had buckled round themselves the preservers which Hodge had given them, and at once felt safer and stronger. But the thing that most put courage into their hearts was the confident bearing of Frank Merriwell.

And so it was with all. It seemed wonderful to the captain to see those youthful excursionists lose their excitement under the calming influence of Merriwell's

words and manner, while the fire roared on now unresisted, and the enveloping smoke rose toward the sky.

Under the supervision of Browning and Diamond, all the boats of the steamer were lowered. Then a ladder was hastily rigged and the girls were instructed to get into one of the boats. Inza and Elsie obeyed, and Winnie Lee was about to follow them, when Barney Lynn made his appearance on the deck, having dashed up from his place of concealment in wild affright. He seemed little better than a madman. His clothing was smoking, and his eyes were rolling savagely. He had remained below until he could stay there no longer. He fancied the boats were pulling away, and that he was being left to burn with the vessel.

Winnie Lee uttered a cry of fright and shrank aside as Lynn dashed past her.

"Here!" commanded Merriwell, thinking at first that Lynn was one of the crew. "Ladies first!"

Bart Hodge and some others put out hands to detain him. He hurled them fiercely aside.

"Out of my way!" he hissed. "Out of my way, or I'll kill you!"

He attempted to spring to the rail and leap down into a boat; but he caught his foot in a rope and went over the rail of the steamer head first. He struck the side of the boat with a crash, and, falling into the water, immediately disappeared.

Diamond and Rattleton swung quickly down into the boat and stood ready to rescue him as soon as his head

rose above the surface. Then every one was startled by a wild cry from the lips of Winnie Lee.

"Oh, Buck!" she screamed.

Buck Badger, choked by the smoke and tortured by the heat, had sufficiently recovered consciousness to realize that he was in dire peril. He did not know much more than that, but the flare of the fire that seemed almost to be licking his face stirred him into activity. The light of the flames showed him the companionway, for Barney Lynn, before dashing to the deck himself, had dragged Badger out of their place of concealment.

Fright and bewilderment, with the effects of the drug and the liquor, combined to temporarily transform the Westerner into a maniac. He staggered to the companion-stairs and dragged himself upward. His scorched and blackened face appearing above the surface of the deck, with the roaring flames for a background, was what had drawn the scream from Winnie Lee.

Badger's senses failed, and his brain darkened when he heard that cry. He caught at the edge of the deck; then reeled and fell heavily backward.

"Oh, Buck! Buck!" Winnie screamed again, and, leaping from the side of the steamer, she bounded like a fawn to the companionway, down which she disappeared like a flash.

As she vanished into that cloud of smoke—no flames were coming up the companionway—she appeared to sink into the furnace of fire that, roaring upward through the vent in the forward deck, appeared to fill almost the entire vessel.

Winnie Lee found Buck Badger lying near the foot of the companion-stairs in an insensible condition. She did not stop to ask herself how he came to be aboard the boat. The only thing she recognized was the fact that he was there, in peril of his life, helpless and unconscious. She threw her arms round his neck and kissed the discolored lips and cheeks.

"Oh, Buck! Buck!" she moaned.

The smoke was stifling. The fire had invaded the engine-room and seemed to be spreading everywhere. Tongues of flame lighted up the scene and shot redly through the all-enveloping smoke. The heat was oppressive, and Winnie could hardly breathe. But she drew herself up, looked about in an undismayed way, and tried to lift the Westerner to his feet.

"Oh, I'm afraid he is dead!" she gasped. "Why don't somebody come to help me? Buck! Buck! can you walk, Buck? I will help you. We must get out of here! Oh, my God!"

Badger was limp and apparently lifeless.

"Buck!" she moaned again, striving to drag him toward the companionway.

Her strength was almost superhuman. She lifted the heavy form and drew it to the foot of the stairs. Then she heard an encouraging call and dimly saw Frank Merriwell coming downward through the dense and blinding smoke to her aid.

Merriwell had leaped after her almost instantly, but to Winnie's distressed and excited mind the interval was appallingly long.

"Here we are, Frank!" she called. "Right here!"

A moment later Frank Merriwell was at her side, with his hands on Badger's shoulders.

"Can it be Buck?" he bewilderingly asked, for he could not conceive how the Kansan came to be there.

"Yes! yes!" Winnie almost fiercely asserted. "Get him up to the deck as quick as you can. I am afraid he is dead. Here, I will help you!"

Browning came rolling down the companion-stairs, fairly falling in his haste and eagerness to be of assistance.

"It's Badger!" Frank announced. "I don't know how he came to be here, but here he is, and we must get him on deck quick."

"All right," said Browning.

Winnie fell back, crying nervously and almost hysterically, as she saw Badger lifted by Browning and Merriwell and carried bodily up through the smoke. She followed close at their heels, coughing and choking.

"He isn't dead!" she heard Merriwell say, and she felt a great wave of joy and thankfulness sweep over her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE STRUGGLE WITH BADGER.

As soon as the cool wind struck his face Badger struggled into consciousness and started up. He glared wildly around, not seeming to recognize anybody. Then he leaped to his feet and made a dash for the steamer's rail. Browning tried to stop him, but was hurled aside as if his bulk had no more weight than a feather.

Badger went over the steamer's side with the agility of a monkey and dropped into a boat that had been brought round from the stern and which was held in place by a single rope in the hands of a man on deck. In his fright and astonishment, the man dropped the rope and the boat that held the crazed Westerner was swept quickly backward and away from the vessel by the tide.

Only one man on the *Crested Foam* seemed to have his wits fully about him, and that man was Frank Merriwell. Every one moved across the deck to the rail over which Badger had scrambled. Barney Lynn, who had been rescued in an insensible condition by Diamond and Rattleton, was temporarily forgotten. Even the fact that the *Crested Foam* was furiously burning, and that their peril was great, was for a moment driven into the background.

But Frank Merriwell did not lose his head. He leaped

the rail as agilely as Badger had done and dropped into another boat.

"Cast it off!" he commanded, and the order was instantly obeyed.

Then he dipped the oars, and the boat, also pulled backward, and away from the steamer by the tide, shot in pursuit of the boat which held the Kansan. Badger took up the oars and pulled a few strokes; then dropped them, rose to his feet, and seemed about to spring overboard.

"He's been drinking, and has gone clean crazy!" Merry muttered, as, looking over his shoulder, he saw the actions of the Westerner. "I should like to know how he came to be on the steamer. But the thing to do now is to save him if I can."

He heard a movement on the deck which told him that others were hurrying to join in the pursuit.

"They'd better get the people off the steamer!" he muttered, looking now toward the burning vessel and seeing several men clambering down into a boat, while the deck of the *Crested Foam* seethed with excitement; "I can look after Badger."

But he was too far away already to make his wishes known. So he bent to the oars and gave himself up to the work of saving the Kansan, who seemed bent on self-destruction.

Merry's boat was the larger and heavier, but he sent it through the water at a great rate of speed, and soon began to overhaul the boat that held Badger.

"Sit down!" he shouted, hoping that the words would be heard by Badger and would not be without effect.

They were not without effect, for Badger, who seemed about to jump out of his boat, dropped into a seat and covered his face with his hands. He did not take up the oars, and a few vigorous strokes brought Frank alongside.

But when Merry's boat bumped against the other and Frank made a movement as if he meant to spring into Badger's boat, the Westerner leaped again to his feet with a wild cry. In another moment he would have gone into the water. But Frank was on him with the quickness and litheness of a panther. The fight for the mastery that followed was of a terrific character. Badger seemed possessed of uncommon strength. Frank threw his arms round him and tried to haul him to the bottom of the boat, but Badger struggled like a madman to break Frank's hold. If the boat had not been broad-beamed and firm, both would have gone into the bay. At last Merry tried one of his wrestling tricks, which knocked the Westerner's feet from under him, and both fell headlong, but with Merriwell on top and victorious.

The other boat, coming from the doomed steamer, propelled by four strong rowers, was now alongside. Bart Hodge leaped out of it and came to Merry's assistance.

"Shall I tie him?" Bart asked, picking up a rope which was lying in the boat's bow.

"I think there is no need!" said Frank, for he saw that Badger was unconscious—though whether that uncon-

sciousness was the result of the heavy fall or was due to excess of excitement he could not tell.

The burning steamer had been seen and her whistled calls for help heard, and other vessels were now bearing down toward her. Frank Merriwell supposed that Badger would regain consciousness in a few seconds, but when he did not the boats were turned toward the *Crested Foam,* with the Westerner lying insensible in one.

Winnie Lee was in a state of hysterical excitement. But her excitement was scarcely greater than that of many others. The question in all minds was, How did Badger come to be aboard the *Crested Foam?* And it received no satisfactory answer. Even Winnie Lee could not still the uneasiness brought by this thought.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

UNPLEASANT APPEARANCES.

"This thing has a queer look, Merry!" Bart Hodge declared, a scowl on his dark face. "There isn't a thing the matter with Badger, except that he was scared and crazy drunk and hurt himself a little when he fell. He pretends that he doesn't know anything, but he's playing possum, I think, and Winnie hangs round him as if he was a martyr. It makes me tired! Now, I should like to know what he was doing down in that steamer when the fire broke out? Did he set it on fire? I tell you, it looks as if he must know something about it."

Merriwell's party had been taken aboard a Sound tug—a large one, with plenty of room and a place where Barney Lynn and Buck Badger could be made as comfortable as possible. Lynn's condition was very serious. He had been taken from the water with blood oozing from his mouth and other evidences of severe internal injuries. But Badger, as Hodge said, did not seem to be hurt much.

The burning steamer, from which smoke was now pouring in dense volumes, and over which the flames were rising, had been abandoned, though several tugs hovered round her. On one of these tugs were the captain and crew of the *Crested Foam*. The big tug, with Merriwell's party, was steaming for the wharves of New Haven, leaving to the other tugs the task of standing

by the ill-fated *Crested Foam* until she sank or burned to the water's edge. Hodge and Merriwell were standing apart on the after-deck, looking back at the burning steamer.

"I can't answer your questions, Bart," Merry replied. "Perhaps I can to-morrow, but not now. We've found from experience that it is neither safe nor just."

"And you're going to apologize for that fellow?"

"Not at all. But we do not understand it now. I want time to think it over and to collect some evidence. When we understand it, I am ready to form my judgment."

"Evidence! What more evidence do you want?"

"Nothing should be considered evidence that is wrapped in mystery."

"Merry, there is dirt there!" Bart asserted, with the emphasis of hate, for he did not like Badger.

"And you're glad to think that there is!" Frank grimly remarked.

Hodge's face flushed.

"Not at all, and it's hardly fair to me, Merry, for you to say so. But you can see yourself how the thing looks. What was he doing down there with that dirty dog, Barney Lynn? I've always insisted that time would show Badger to be one of your worst enemies, yet you're willing to stand up for him! You know what Lynn has done and tried to do to you!"

"The proofs against Lynn might be stronger!" Frank reminded.

Hodge could not hide his disappointment and disgust.

"Until I know more, I am not ready to condemn

Badger!" Merry declared, generous to the last. "For the present, I do not think the chain of proof against him is at all complete!"

"Why?" snarled Hodge.

"Because he would not intentionally set fire to a boat with Winnie Lee on it. Whatever is the truth, that much is clear to me. He loves Winnie Lee."

Bart Hodge turned sullenly away, and Merry descended to where Badger was lying on a cot that had been placed for him. The insane light had gone out of Badger's eyes. Winnie had been drawn away by her father, and no one but Browning was near the Kansan as Merriwell approached the cot.

Badger had recognized Winnie and had a dim recollection of recent events, including his struggle with Merriwell. But it all seemed like the phantasmagoria of a dream. He could hardly convince himself it was not a dream. Other uncertain memories were troubling him. He knew he had gone to that low dive in the disreputable part of the city for the purpose of drowning his troubles in drink. He recalled his intense desire to be near Winnie Lee, which took him to the waterside, but his recollection of the meeting with Barney Lynn and what followed after that was of the haziest character.

"How are you?" Merriwell asked.

"I don't know," said Badger. "But I'm beginning to feel I'd be better off dead. Did you keep me from jumping into the bay?"

Frank nodded.

"I was hoping that might be a dream. You ought

to have let me alone! It would have saved trouble, I reckon! Where am I, anyway?"

"You're on the tug, *Ocean Belle,* and we'll soon be at the wharves of New Haven. You were on the steamer *Crested Foam.*"

Badger was silent a moment.

"How did I get there?"

"I didn't know but you might be able to tell."

"That was the excursion boat?"

"Yes."

Again the Westerner was silent.

"Winnie was on that boat?"

"Yes, and she helped to save you from being burned to death!"

"Then that wasn't a dream, either! I hoped it was. I allow that you made a big mistake, Merry, when you didn't let me drown. I'd like to explain to you all about it, but I don't understand it myself. I reckon the only explanation is that I was drunk. Whatever comes, I'll have to stand it. Only I wish you'd let me jump into the bay when I tried to!"

"There was some one with you," Merry volunteered, really pitying Badger from the bottom of his heart. Perhaps the mention of his name will drive some of the fog out of your head. Barney Lynn came up out of the steamer about the time you did. He was driven out by the fire!"

With a groan Badger turned his face away. Seeing that he did not care to talk further, Merriwell turned to go and was followed by Bruce Browning.

"What do you think of it?" Bruce asked.

"I think that I shall try to get an interview with Barney Lynn, if he recovers sufficiently to talk."

"They say he is in a dying condition now."

"You have an opinion?" queried Frank.

"My opinion is that things look mighty black for Buck Badger!"

As Merry found, Bruce was not the only one who thought so. The universal thought seemed to be that there was something black behind the mystery of the Westerner's sudden appearance aboard the *Crested Foam.* Badger was known to dislike Merriwell and to hate Hodge. Apparently he had been hidden on the boat in company with Barney Lynn.

"But he wouldn't set fire to a boat and run the risk of burning himself!" Frank urged. "If he set fire to the boat he would know he couldn't escape from it without being seen."

"It hurts me to hear you standing up for that fellow in that way," Bart declared.

"I'm not standing up for him, but simply calling attention to some points that should not be overlooked. He would not run the risk of burning himself."

"He had been drinking," said Diamond, "and an intoxicated man will do foolish things. He doesn't often stop to reason everything out and weigh his chances."

"But Barney Lynn?" questioned Frank.

"He was drunk, too!"

"They were both drunk," said Hodge, "and they

sneaked into that boat for the purpose of doing dirt. Nobody will ever make me think otherwise."

When the tug reached the landing, Barney Lynn was conveyed to the home of his grandmother, which was not far away, and Badger was sent to his room in a carriage. Elsie and Inza went home together in a cab. Winnie also went home in a cab with her father, who had a long and serious talk with her on the way.

"I'm going to follow Lynn," said Merriwell, after the cabs had rolled away, taking the arm of Bart Hodge. "Wouldn't you like to go with me? If he comes to himself, I shall try to get a talk with him. Somehow, I feel that he could straighten out matters for us."

"And so could Badger, if he'd talk!"

"Will you go along?"

"Why, of course!" answered Hodge, in a pleased tone, for Merry's good-will and friendship meant a great deal to him. "I suppose you think I'm too hard on Badger."

"I feel that no man should be condemned while the evidence against him is all fogged, as this is."

"How does it come, Merry, that you can have a good word for everybody?" Hodge asked.

"Well, now, Bart, don't you think it must be pleasanter to feel that every man is all right until you know otherwise, than it is to feel that every man is all wrong until he has proved that his intentions and his heart are good? That's the way I look at the world. And I'm sure I'm a good deal happier than if I held to the other theory."

"You mean that I hold to the other theory?"

"I haven't said so. One thing, though, when you become prejudiced against a man you are not willing to admit that any good may be placed to his credit. I want you to become broader than that, Bart. I'm your friend, you know, and I would not express myself thus if I didn't think it is for your good. You're too much inclined to take a dark view of things, and you're too quick to form adverse opinions, and you cling to them too stubbornly when you do form them."

Bart checked his rising irritation.

"Of course, you're right, Merry!" he admitted. "I wish I had your temperament. It's unfortunate for me that I haven't."

"But the sunshiny way of looking at things can be cultivated," Frank insisted. "I want you to try to turn in the sunshine and turn out the clouds. You'll be a good deal happier and get more solid comfort out of life if you do."

"Perhaps I can some time," said Hodge. "Just keep digging at me. I'll try not to get offended."

They had no trouble in finding the house to which Lynn had been conveyed. They knew its location well, from certain investigations previously made; and they knew, too, that Barney Lynn's grandmother was the pretended "seventh daughter of a seventh daughter," who, in the guise of Malmo the Fortune Queen, had on one occasion done Merriwell a real service.

But Bart and Merry were doomed to disappointment. Barney Lynn was still unconscious, and the surgeon who

had been hastily summoned stated that his injuries were so serious that he might never be able to speak again.

"And of course we'd be fools to accept any explanation that Badger makes!" Hodge observed, as they turned away from the house.

The sunshine had not yet come into Hodge's heart.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FRANK MERRIWELL'S REWARD.

"Frank Merriwell is one of the noblest men living!"

The words were thought, not spoken, by Winnie Lee, who was picking her way down a narrow street by the waterside the morning after the burning of the *Crested Foam*. She was on her way to the home of Barney Lynn.

Her thoughts were of an interview had with Merriwell the previous evening, after Merriwell and Hodge had made their unprofitable visit to the house to which Lynn had been taken. Merry had brought her information that Badger had been seen in the campus and was apparently all right again, and had taken occasion to assure her that, whatever might be the true explanation of the strange incidents of the day, he still believed that Badger was not guilty of any wrong intentions.

Frank had gone even further, and had spoken in praise of Badger to the fullest permissible extent, and in every way had tried to lift the cloud that he knew was resting on the heart of Winnie Lee. It was the memory of the kind words spoken in behalf of the man she loved that now touched Winnie and brought from her the mental exclamation recorded at the head of this chapter.

"When almost every one else, even my own father, is ready to put a wrong construction on Buck's presence on the steamer, Frank is ready to defend him, just as if

he and Buck had always been on the best of terms. I wish they were friends, and if Buck and I are ever—ever anything to each other again, I'm going to try to bring them together. If they understood each other better, I'm sure they could not help liking each other."

Winnie Lee was sorely troubled by one thing, however. In spite of their recent quarrel and separation, she had a feeling that Badger owed her some word of explanation, and that he ought to convey to her by some direct method the information that he was not seriously injured. She could not know that Badger had not been able to piece out his scraps of memory into a plausible explanation of the mystery surrounding his movements, nor that he still felt his presence to be distasteful to the girl he loved.

"I'm glad you've come!" was the greeting Winnie received from the bent old woman, Lynn's grandmother. "I thought he was dying awhile ago, but he has rallied again. He will be glad to see you, too."

She looked even older and shakier than ever, and her steps were tottering as she admitted her and conducted the girl into a half-darkened room, where Barney Lynn lay, white and gasping and with death evidently near.

Winnie was oppressed by the atmosphere of the place, but she took the seat offered her and looked into the drawn face of the dying boatman.

"Oh, if he would only tell what he knows!" she thought.

The hope that he might do that was what had drawn her to the house. Her desire seemed to communicate

itself to Lynn. He opened his eyes, and, seeing her there, began to talk in a choking way. The old woman brought him a drink of water, which he swallowed feverishly.

"I'm glad you've come," he hoarsely whispered. "I wish the others was here. But you won't have time to send for 'em. I must tell you—you!"

He tried to lift himself, while his burning eyes appeared to search her very soul.

"I was to blame for all of that!" he declared.

The door opened behind Winnie, but she had only eyes and ears for Barney Lynn, and he saw only the girl before him.

"I was to blame for all that. He came down there before daylight, and he wanted to go on the excursion boat, because some young lady was to be on the boat that day. P'r'aps 'twas you. And I drugged him. I got him on the boat and robbed him. The money is here somewhere. He didn't know anything, and I was afraid to go on deck, and your party came and I couldn't go on deck. Then the waste got afire from my pipe. Oh, God, it was terrible!"

He threw an arm over his face as if to shut out the sight.

When he took the arm away his eyes opened wide in fright. He clutched the bedclothing and lifted himself almost to a sitting posture. Then his voice rang out in a scream.

"Oh, God!" he shrieked. "There he is now! It's his ghost! Take it away! Take it away!"

He fairly leaped in the bed; then fell back with a gasping moan, the fire dying out of his eyes. Barney Lynn was dead.

Winnie Lee turned and saw Buck Badger, who had entered the room unnoticed by her. Back of Badger was Bruce Browning, who had also softly entered and had heard all.

* * * * * * *

Frank Merriwell was in his room, trying to study, in spite of the thoughts that persistently intruded, when footsteps were heard in the corridor and a soft rap sounded on the floor.

"Come in!" he called, expecting to see one of his chums. The door opened and Buck Badger entered.

"Glad to see you!" said Merry, pushing out a chair, for he had heard of Barney Lynn's confession from Browning. The Westerner took the chair in a hesitating way.

"I didn't know whether you would be or not. But I reckoned it wouldn't be doing the white thing by you unless I came over and thanked you."

Merriwell looked at him inquiringly.

"You've heard about Lynn?"

"Yes, I've heard that."

"Winnie and I have had a talk," said Badger, slightly coloring. "There's been a good deal of misunderstanding all round, but we've straightened that out. Lynn couldn't have drugged me, though, if I hadn't been

drinking; but I'm glad he didn't tell Winnie that. To just that extent I'm a coward, I reckon."

"He drugged me once when I hadn't been drinking," smiled Merry.

"Well, I was drinking. But I've resolved that I'll never touch the stuff again."

Merriwell arose and took him by the hand.

"Let me congratulate you, Badger! Stick to it! The stuff is always doing harm, and never any good."

"And I wanted to thank you for what you said to Winnie about me. You praised me and told her that you knew I was a man, even when everything was black against me, and all the fellows condemned me. I sha'n't forget it none whatever. Nothing can ever pay for that!"

"Oh, yes, I'm paid now!" Frank declared.

"How?"

"Why, to know that I've been a help to some one—to Winnie Lee, for instance, and to you. To have you say that you never intend to touch liquor again is pleasant to me, don't you think? If I can scatter a little sunshine as I go along, and be of help to my friends, that's all I want. I don't care for any other reward."

CHAPTER XXXV.

FRESHMAN AND SOPHOMORE.

The incidents related in the last chapter had caused no little stir and talk in the college, and there had been several animated discussions between various factions in the school as to what honor Frank was entitled to, for saving Buck Badger's life, and to what extent that personage was connected with the fire on the ship—since all the incidents connected with that affair were not commonly known.

Just now, indeed, the disagreement had reached a very active stage—and the combatants seemed to have pretty well divided themselves, as usual, into freshman versus sophomore.

In fact, there was almost a riot in progress; and cries and the smash of hats—which were used as half-club and half-boxing glove—could be heard on every hand.

Smack!

The hat of a sophomore flew off and struck crashingly against the wall. Jack Ready's hand delivered the blow.

"No tripping of the light fantastic on my toes, if you please!" Ready chirped. "My feet are not a vaudeville stage! Continuous performance——"

Crash!

Jack Ready's stiff hat was jammed down over his eyes so suddenly that the sentence was cut off in the middle. Another freshman hat descended with startling

unceremoniousness over its owner's ears, and freshman and sophomore, locked in each other's arms, rolled on the floor in a wild scramble. Ready struggled sputteringly with his hat, for it was jammed tight.

"The man who struck so foul a blow——"

"Will strike another!" came in the voice of Donald Pike, and again the hat went down over Ready's ears.

"Refuse me!" cried Ready, lowering his head and blindly butting in the direction of the voice. The lowered head struck something, but it was the protuberant stomach of Professor Bald, instructor in Greek, and not Donald Pike.

"Whoop!" shouted Ready, as Professor Bald went over on his back. "I think I shall have to waltz on your abdomen to pay you for that! There are corn-fields on my tootsy-wootsies, and I don't allow anybody to cultivate them but myself!"

He kicked out with playful severity, and Professor Bald, who had rolled over and was trying to rise to his feet, caught it in the lower part of the back and forthwith proceeded to plow up the dust of the uncarpeted hall with his prominent, fleshy nose.

A dozen wild freshmen and sophomores, rushing at each other, walked over the bruised, indignant and humiliated professor, who, if he had known all the languages and dialects of the earth, ancient and modern, would not have been able to find words torrid and explosive enough to properly express his feelings at that moment.

"Pike is a good name for a highway to walk on," said

Ready, kicking out again as he struggled with his crushed and refractory hat. "They are usually covered with dirt, and——"

Smack!

A sophomore fist struck him in the face this time and tumbled him backward with all the celerity exhibited by Professor Bald. Then the scrambling and screeching combatants proceeded to walk over Ready and to dance round him in a manner that threatened serious damage to his anatomy.

But the freshman leader was equal to the occasion. He tore the blinding hat from his head and, thrusting his fingers into his mouth, blew so cutting a blast that it penetrated through the hall like the whistle of a locomotive. Then he pulled down the man nearest to him, who was a sophomore, and thrust up his head in the space made momentarily vacant. There was a wild rush of freshmen in his direction, and in another moment Ready was standing erect, surrounded by a body-guard of friends and followers, who stood willing at all times to fight with him and for him to the last.

Donald Pike seemed by common consent to be the leader of the sophomores, taking the place which Buck Badger would have filled if present. Class spirit, like politics, makes strange bedfellows, and following the leadership of Pike were Jim Hooker, Morton Agnew and Bertrand Defarge, Phil Porter, Bob Brewster and the Chickering set, together with Coles, Mullen, Benson, Billings, Chan Webb, and others.

"Go for them!" Pike shouted, smashing the hat of

the freshman nearest him and at the same time leading a charge on the crowd that surrounded Jack Ready.

The rush seemed fairly to lift Ready from his feet. He was caught up as a chip on a churning tide and borne toward the door, toward which the stream of fighting freshmen and sophomores now poured.

"Refuse me!" he cried, digging his hands into the hair of the youth on whose shoulders he found himself perched. "But if I ride the topmost wave, I must hang on to the crested foam!"

A howl was the answer.

"Don't pull out my hair by the roots, please!" was the vociferated exclamation, in the voice of Julian Ives, for Ready was digging his fingers into Ives' beautiful bang.

Ives wiggled and twisted, and even tried to fall down to rid himself of his unpleasant rider, but all to no purpose. The closely packed crowd bore him right on, without effort on his part, and so resistlessly, in fact, that his struggles were futile.

"Gwathious!" panted Lew Veazie. "My toeth are cwuthed off, I know! If I ever get out of thith, I'll wemain out. Ow! Quit punching me in the back, pleathe! Take your foot off my thoulder!"

Recognizing the lisp, Jack Ready, in a spirit of malicious fun, had thrown one foot heavily on Veazie's shoulder. There were a few hats on the heads of their owners. Ready did not know what had become of his own. One of these hats he deftly plucked up.

"Wefuthe me!" he cried, imitating Veazie's lisp. "But

thith ith tho twopical, you know, I weally mutht fan mythelf. My wadiant cheekth are ath warm ath a burning heart!"

He dropped the lisp as the crowd emerged, still struggling, from the doorway, into the outer air. He was still upborne on the shoulders of Julian Ives, with one foot dragging into Lew Veazie's shoulder and his free hand fanning with the hat.

"Hail to the chief who in triumph advances!"

Then he disappeared, for the expanding crowd permitted Lew Veazie and Ives, and the others who had been upholding Ready, to wiggle out from under him and drop him to the ground.

The fight raged with even greater fierceness here than in the big hallway. Within five minutes there was not a respectable-looking hat anywhere near, and sophomores and freshmen alike were generously adorned with bloody noses, bruised faces, swelling lips, and blackened eyes.

Some of the instructors ran up into the second story of the building and began to note down the names of such members of the struggling mob as they could identify. Lew Veazie, Julian Ives, Ollie Lord, and their friends separated themselves from the combatants as speedily as they could, for the pace set by Ready and Donald Pike was entirely too wild for them to follow.

"Thuch a mob!" gasped Veazie, feeling of his bruised shoulder. "I thould have thtayed out, if I had thuppothed I wath to be kicked to death by that howwible Jack Weady. I only went into it to have a little fun, and I wath almotht killed!"

Gene Skelding looked in dismay at his gorgeous shirt-front. It was torn, and his lovely sky-blue tie was gone.

"I was nearly choked to death!" sighed Tilton Hull, putting his fingers lovingly on his bruised neck, from which the big collar had been violently wrenched.

"And I was just about smothered!" Ollie Lord declared, for Ollie was diminutive as to stature, like Lew Veazie, and his head had been far below the surface of things. The freshmen and sophomores were still fighting, with Donald Pike roaring his commands and Jack Ready chirping his orders like a bird.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BEER AND PIES.

"Beer!" cried a sophomore.

"Beer!" screeched a freshman.

"Beer!" yelled a dozen voices, in chorus.

The exclamations and the sight of a big beer-wagon, drawn by two massive horses and driven by a comfortable-looking German driver, had a marvelous effect on the scrambling, fighting throng. Nothing better to separate the combatants could have been found, if the instructors and professors had gone about with a lighted candle looking for it. There had been little or no animosity in the struggle, anyway, and the appearance of the beer-wagon offered a new outlet for surplus energies, and a new temptation. Clawing hands came away from choking throats, straining arms and legs were released, bruised heads and bodies were forgotten.

Class animosities had no place while such an opportunity presented itself, and the charge on the German driver was overwhelming.

"Beer!" was the universal cry.

The students stopped the horses and swarmed over the barrels.

"Sold!" cried Donald Pike, as he turned one of the barrels over with his foot. The barrel was empty.

"There is some in here, but it sounds as if it's thick enough to need a strainer!" cried a freshman.

"Call on Jack Ready!" suggested Pike. "There are holes enough in his think-tank."

The German driver twisted round on his high seat.

"Mine friends!" he sputtered. "Der peer vrom dose parrels vos all gone. You vos making a shoke uf yourselufs."

"Stuff a bologna sausage into his mouth!" shouted a sophomore. "That will keep him still. We've got to have some beer. That scrimmage made me thirstier than the Sahara."

"There is beer in this!" Ready shouted, as he turned a heavy barrel from the wagon to the street. "Give me a lift, fellows, two or three of you. There's a lot of stuff in this one!"

Two freshmen sprang to his assistance, and away the barrel rolled. Donald Pike witnessed the movement and rightly guessed that one barrel, at least, held beer.

"Stop him!" he shouted. "Stop that barrel!"

He sprang from the wagon and was about to lead the pursuit, when another cry arose:

"Pies!"

The new excitement proved to be the passing of a pie-wagon.

"Pies! pies!" screeched sophomores and freshmen, in one wild chorus.

The driver of the pie-wagon gave his horses a cut and tried to drive on, but some students sprang for the horses' heads and brought the animals to a speedy halt.

To Donald Pike, pies seemed even more desirable than beer.

"This way, fellows!" he called, as he ran for the back of the wagon, while the driver stood up in his seat and fairly tore his hair.

The rear door of the pie-wagon was forced open and half a dozen students—sophomores and freshmen—began to lift out the rows of shelving along the sides of the wagon. Jack Ready and his companions had disappeared with the beer-barrel.

"More fun!" laughed Ready, as he heard the cries behind them. "We must get back and have a hand in that!"

"Yes, I want a finger in that pie!" said one of his companions.

"Pies and beer!" said the other.

"Pizen beer!" chirped Ready. "I didn't know you were a temperance lecturer."

"Right in here!" suggested one of the barrel-rollers, indicating a passage that led to the basement of the college building.

"No!" said Ready. "That won't do. We don't want the brewer to have a chance to bring an action for damages against the college. There are a lot of boards and a tree. Let's up-end it behind that tree and stack the boards round it. Now is our chance, for everybody is thinking of the pie-wagon."

It was the work of less than a minute to carry out Jack Ready's plan; and then Ready and his friends ran wildly back to the pie-wagon. A yelling crowd surged round the students who were lifting the shelves out of

the wagon, while the angry driver, wholly unheeded, was shouting himself black in the face.

The German with the beer-wagon had driven on, taking this opportunity to escape. The students were screaming their orders for pie.

"Lemon cream! Hot mince! Custard!"

"Pass out your cranberry pie!" yelled a sophomore.

"Blueberry à la mode!" chirped Jack Ready. The scramble for pies suited the Chickering set better than the rough fighting in the hall.

"Give uth thome of the betht pineapple you've got!" lisped Lew Veazie, forgetting the indignities which he fancied had been heaped upon him.

"Go buy your pies, you lisping dude!" angrily shouted the driver. "Do you think this a free-lunch counter? Do you take this for a college bake-shop?"

His indignation seemed to be unnecessary and brought into play for effect. There were no pies in the pie-wagon. The driver was returning to the bakery from an extended trip, and had sold out everything.

"Hang him!" screeched a student. "This is base deception! This is an insult to Yale! To bring a pie-wagon here without any pies in it! Suffer not the wretch to live!"

"Hang him!" was the cry that rolled in a great wave of sound across the ground.

The driver's face paled, and he dropped back to the seat, grasping the lines and whip. But a couple of students caught the bits of the horses.

"Cut his head off!" screeched a sophomore, picking up one of the empty pie-pans and sailing it through the air at the driver. In another minute the air was full of flying pie-pans. There were no pies, the attack on the beer-wagon had been a disappointment, but some fun might still be had out of the pie-pans.

Immediately a pie-pan duel began. The students left the heads of the horses and joined in it. Pans were the weapons, and they seemed to fill the air.

Some of the young fellows chased after the wagon, for in it there were more pans which they wanted for missiles. But the driver whipped his horses and then whipped behind, cutting the hands and faces of those who were trying to get more pans, and escaped.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JACK READY'S DANGER.

"I guess I'd better look after that barrel of beer," thought Jack Ready, as he stared at the vanishing pie-wagon. "Some of these swell-headed sophomores may beer it—I mean spirit it—away. When you've captured spoil, don't allow anybody to spoil it!"

He called to a freshman to accompany him, but the freshman's attention was too much taken up by the pie-pan battle that was still raging, and he did not hear the call.

"Refuse me!" chirped Ready, dodging to escape a flying pie-pan. "That came near decapitating me! If I knew the best way to decapitate that beer barrel! We'll either have to bore a hole in the barrel or kick in the head!"

He ran on at a rapid gait in the direction of the tree, passing from sight of the pie-pan combatants as he turned an angle of the building. Then he stopped short, with an exclamation of surprise.

"Are my peepers just right?"

The concealing boards were flat on the ground, and the beer-barrel had disappeared from behind the tree. He looked up into the air, and then stared at the ground at the root of the tree, as if he fancied the barrel might have flown up into the air or sunk out of sight in the earth.

"Here is witchcraft for you!" his round, apple-cheeked face revealing his intense surprise. "Those villains of sophomores——"

He gave another gasp of astonishment and turned toward the college building, for he had caught a glimpse of a vanishing form bending over the lost beer-barrel. Beer-barrel and the man who was rolling it went out of sight in the narrow passage that led to the basement and the furnace-room.

"Ho!" Ready whistled, blowing out his fat cheeks. "Here's a go! If that is a freshman, he is a fool; and if he's a sophomore, he is two fools. That basement is no proper receptacle for stolen goods!"

Ready was beginning to feel that perhaps the students had been unwise in their attacks on the wagons, now that he was becoming good enough to reflect on the possible consequences.

"It will be bad enough to be lectured about this thing by the instructors, without risking arrest and the police courts!"

The freshman leader turned from the tree and hurried now as fast as he could to the passage in which the beer-barrel had vanished. The place was dark and spooky, and nothing was to be seen at first, but Ready pushed on and soon came in sight of the barrel. It had been rolled against a wall, and two men stood by it. They were disreputable-looking fellows, too, quite different in appearance from the students whom Ready had expected to see.

"Refuse me!" said Ready, advancing as if he owned

both the brewery and the building. "That barrel belongs above. If you will be kind enough to cycle it back to the tree from which you took it, I'll sign your pardon in red ink with a stylographic pen."

"And if we don't?" questioned the older and most villainous of the men.

"You may wish that you had!"

"Who rolled this barrel off the wagon?" the younger man demanded.

"Refuse me if I say that you didn't!"

The older put on a blustering look.

"We're workin' for that brewery, and the driver told us to come back and look after this beer. We're lookin' after it! The whole lot of ye is goin' to be arrested for what you done!"

Jack Ready pulled down the lid of one eye.

"Do you see anything green in my oculary region? Perhaps you think I am a jay because my friends sometimes call me a bird—jaybird! You will pardon me if I use my wings!"

He hopped upon the barrel as lightly as if he were indeed blessed with wings; then put his fingers into his mouth for the purpose of sending out his call to the freshmen.

But the whistling call did not go forth. Ready's airy manner threw the older man into a rage, and, rightly guessing that Ready meant to sound a call for assistance, he dealt the freshman leader a heavy blow that knocked him from the barrel against the wall. Jack Ready sank

limply down between the barrel and the wall, with a hollow groan.

The younger man looked startled.

"You can't crack such a head as his!" the older man grunted. "I couldn't stand his sass, and I don't much care if I've broke his neck!"

The younger man bent over and pulled Ready away from the wall, pushing the barrel aside at the same time.

"I believe you've killed him, dad!" he gasped.

The older man stooped and looked into Ready's face with a glance of alarm. Ready was limp and seemingly lifeless. The blow had been a heavy one, and the force with which his head had been driven against the stone wall was crushing.

A pattering of feet sounded near the entrance.

"Git him back in here farther," the younger man panted, seizing Ready and dragging him farther into the darkness. "Now, lie low!"

The pattering feet did not penetrate into the basement, however, and after awhile the younger man crept to the entrance and took a cautious survey.

"We can't go out yet," he reported, when he came back. "We may have to stay here till dark. If that feller," nodding toward Ready, "comes to, we can keep him in here till then, or longer!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BART AND ELSIE.

"I wonder where she is going?"

The uncertain smile that came to the dark face of Bart Hodge contained as much bitterness as pleasure.

Elsie Bellwood had come into view, tripping with light feet down an unpretentious street leading toward the water-front. She swung a basket on her arm, and she was alone. It is not strange that Bart wondered where she was going.

He lifted his hat as she came near, all the time wondering if he ought not to have turned and gone the other way, and whether his presence would be welcome, or otherwise.

"Good evening!" she said, in her bright, girlish way, the gold in her hair seeming to rival the sunshine and her eyes like bits from the bluest of blue skies.

The shadow, that was almost a frown, left Bart's face. He looked at the basket.

"On a little errand of kindness," she explained. "Won't you go along?"

It was an invitation which Hodge could not resist.

"I didn't know whether you would want to be seen with me again," he said.

"That isn't very kind, Bart, even if it is true, and it seems to me it can't be true!"

"Let me carry your basket!" he requested, taking it

from her arm and seeming to desire to evade a direct reply to her statement. "You haven't said where you are going."

"To Mrs. Moran's. Barney Lynn's grandmother, you know! Winnie and I were down there yesterday, and we discovered that the old lady is actually destitute of almost everything. We took her some things last evening, and now I'm going again. Winnie couldn't go this time, because of company that dropped in. But I was resolved that Mrs. Moran should have the things she needs so much, and here I am!"

"Without an escort!"

"Why, you are with me!"

"But you were without an escort! And this is not a particularly desirable quarter."

"Winnie and I were out a great deal later than this last night. I shall take a car as I go home. I can get one at the corner just above."

Bart's face darkened again, but she did not observe it.

"She does not want me to walk back with her," was his thought. "Well, I sha'n't trouble her, if she prefers that I shouldn't!"

"It was dreadful about Barney Lynn, and about Badger, wasn't it?" she commented, as they walked on.

"I should say that Lynn was a worthless dog, who didn't deserve to live—and you know my opinion of Badger!"

Elsie Bellwood flashed Hodge an amused look.

"Your kindly feelings for Badger are not based on the

fact that Winnie and he seem to have come to a reconciliation?"

Hodge flushed.

"I don't think you ought to say that, Miss Bellwood!"

"Miss Bellwood!"

"Elsie, if you prefer that. I don't think you ought to say that, Elsie."

"Why not?"

"Well, you must know that it isn't pleasant for a fellow to feel that a girl thinks more of some one else than she does of him."

"But when you were going with Winnie, there was a mutual understanding between you that it was just a game for the benefit of Badger. Winnie told me so herself."

"And when you and I were such—good friends, it was just a game for the benefit of Frank Merriwell. I didn't think so at the time, but I can see now that it was!"

"You know that I like you very much, Bart!" she reminded.

"Oh, yes, of course!" almost sneeringly.

"You know that I do, even when you talk that way! And I know that you like Frank."

Hodge was silent.

"I'm a dirty dog, or I wouldn't have done as I did!" he grumbled. "I was really willing to crowd myself into your company, just as I'm doing now——"

"You're not crowding yourself into my company!" she corrected.

"I was willing and anxious to do that," he went on, "even when I knew that you belong of right to Frank Merriwell, and he is the best and most loyal friend in the world. You don't need to tell me, or to remind me, anything about that. It was not right, and I've lost sleep over it since, thinking how low and mean I must have seemed to him when I was doing it. Yet he never said a word to condemn me."

"When you condemn yourself you condemn me," said Elsie. "You couldn't have been very much in my society if I had not been willing and consenting. You forget that."

"No, I forget nothing; and I shall never forget that Frank Merriwell is my best friend, and that I treated him as I shouldn't want him to treat me!"

He noticed a look of distress on Elsie's face.

"I wish I could think that Frank was distressed by what we did, but I feel sure that he hasn't been. He did not say anything to you, simply because he was not objecting to what you did."

"Why wasn't he?" Bart demanded.

"Because I think he has come to care more for Inza than for me."

The bright face was shadowed, and the blue eyes seemed dim with unshed tears.

"He paid a good deal of attention to Inza, you know, when Inza first came to Winnie's this winter," Elsie went on.

"And you became jealous of her when you found this out," Bart commented.

"I wasn't pleased," she admitted. "It isn't human nature—anyway, not girl nature—to like a thing like that. For you know what Inza and Frank were to each other once."

"I haven't forgotten it!" in a non-committal way.

"Nor has he forgotten it. Nor have I. Such a thing as that couldn't be forgotten."

Hodge's face was grave and moody.

"I thought as you do," he admitted, "that Merry was caring a good deal again for Inza. I have always been a girl-hater, but somehow I have come to like you. I was mean enough to want to come in at that time, thinking it my chance, for I supposed that you and Frank might never be anything to each other again. But I see I was a fool. Served me right, too, for I should have thought of Merry, and made sure that I was right before trying a thing like that!"

He looked up and found that they were in front of the home of Mrs. Moran. Elsie also made the same discovery. He passed her the basket.

He turned away as she took it. Someway, the conversation had become unpleasant to her, and though she really wanted to continue it in spite of this feeling, she feared to. She felt that she had already said and confessed entirely too much.

"She doesn't want me to wait to walk back with her!" Bart thought.

She stepped toward the door, then stopped.

"Bart," she said, and her tones had power to thrill him, "perhaps I've said too much!"

"It will go no further!" was his abrupt promise, pain stabbing through his heart.

"Don't be so quick, Bart! I didn't mean that. I am not afraid to trust you with anything. Remember that, won't you? And remember, too, Bart, that I value your friendship very much—and that I am your friend always!"

"Nothing more?" Bart muttered, as he again turned away.

He heard her rap on the door; then a moment later heard the door open and close upon her. The banging door seemed to come between them, and again that stabbing pain went through his heart.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A QUIET TALK.

Elsie Bellwood found Barney Lynn's grandmother, Mrs. Moran, in bed, too weak to do housework or prepare her meals. But the eyes in the withered face of the old woman were as keen, seemingly, as if she were twenty years younger.

"You're just a bright angel, child!" she cried, as Elsie placed some tempting food from the basket before her and began to put things to rights in the house. "I've seen famous pictures of angels in my time, with blue eyes and golden hair, and you're just like them."

The fading sunlight, falling through the window, seemed to crown Elsie as with an aureole.

"When the sunshine strikes your hair just that way, it seems brighter than gold," said the old woman, in childish delight. "It's a sort of red gold, the kind the painters rave over and call Titian gold. Yes, I've seen pictures of angels with hair like that, and that's what you are—an angel—or you wouldn't trouble yourself to come here and do this work for a helpless old woman like me!"

There was a flush of pleasure in Elsie's face.

"I enjoy doing work of this kind!" she declared. "But I shall feel unhappy when I have to go away and leave you alone. Winnie is willing to employ some one to come down here and wait on you, if you will let her."

"Oh, I shall be all right in a few days, child. I shall be better here, or better off up yonder!"

The woman's bright eyes dimmed a little and her voice choked.

"It was very sad to lose your grandson," said Elsie, sympathizingly, as she stood by the bed.

"That isn't the saddest part, child. It's the way he went. If he had only been a good man! But he was trying to injure some one—a friend of yours—when he was hurt. That is what touches me here!"

Mrs. Moran laid a thin hand over her heart.

"He was trying to injure Mr. Badger this time, and once before, that I know of, he tried to injure Mr. Merriwell."

Elsie sank into a chair and drew the chair nearer the bed.

"I'm not a fortune-teller, bright hair," said Mrs. Moran, taking one of Elsie's hands in her thin palms; "but I can read hearts. Not in cards or tea grounds, or anything of that kind, but in faces. I can see that your heart isn't happy, and it ought to be the happiest heart in the world, with those sweet eyes and that bright hair. Your heart isn't happy, dear! Perhaps, if you'll tell me what the trouble is I can help you."

The desire to confide in some one in time of trouble is strong in most girls. Especially was this true of Elsie, who was of a confiding disposition. But if her nature had been quite otherwise, Mrs. Moran's kindly look and sympathetic tones would have been almost irresistible.

Mrs. Moran drew the hand nearer as if she would read the lines in the palm.

"Perhaps I can help you, dear!" she repeated. "Some people would tell you that young men are not worth worrying about, and you wouldn't believe it, and it wouldn't be true, if I said it. I was once a young girl like you, and I am sure I know what love is!"

The color was mounting to Elsie's cheeks.

"You love some one, dear, who does not love you?"

"I am afraid that he doesn't love me!" Elsie tremblingly confessed.

"He loves some one else, perhaps?"

"I am afraid that he does!"

"And does he know that you care for him?"

"Yes."

"And has he given you to understand that he cares for you?"

"He—he has never given me any direct promises——"

"That he would marry you?"

"No."

"And this other girl?"

"He has not given her any such promise. But she loved him once, and he loved her, and—and I am afraid they still love each other. She is very handsome, with fine eyes and dark hair. Oh, she is so noble-looking! She is a perfect queen! And—and I couldn't blame him, could I, if he should care for her again, and—and forget me?"

"You are a queen, my dear!" softly stroking the hand.

"Your love is worth more than words can express. Any man——"

"But you do not know who I mean by this other girl."

"I think I do, my dear. And I think I know who the young man is. This is the girl they call Inza, and the young man is Mr. Merriwell. I guessed it all before you made any confession."

Elsie turned away that the woman might not see the mist that filled her eyes.

"This other girl is a splendid girl! She is a queen, as you say. I have watched both of you more than once, when you didn't dream that I was near. You want to know how to win this young man?"

"Yes," Elsie admitted. "It's wicked, I know. But I would win him and keep him, in spite of all the pain that it might mean for Inza. I am wicked and selfish, but I do not want them to care for each other again. I feel sometimes as if I would be willing to do almost anything to prevent that!"

Mrs. Moran put out the thin hand and stroked the bright hair on which the sunshine fell lovingly.

"I love you, Elsie, because you are so sweet and true. I admire Inza. Perhaps if I knew her as well as you I should love her, too."

"I am ashamed of what I've said," Elsie confessed. "I want you to try to forget it, if you can. I ought not to feel that way toward Inza. But I do feel as if she is coming in between Mr. Merriwell and me."

Elsie's thoughts flew back to the time when she and

Inza had reached a complete understanding, as they believed, concerning all these things.

"And she gave him up to me at that time!" was her thought. "And now she is forgetting that! Under similar circumstances, any other girl might do the same; but it almost makes me hate her!"

Mrs. Moran's keen eyes noted the changed expression.

"There is only one way for any girl to really and truly gain the love of a true man," she said gently. "And that is by being a good and true woman. Everything else will fail. And don't you think, dear, that everything else ought to fail?"

"Yes," said Elsie, sitting bolt upright. "I am not worthy of him, or I wouldn't have the thoughts I do. I think dreadful things sometimes, Mrs. Moran. Oh, you don't know how wickedly I felt toward Inza at times! It makes me shudder. And yet I play the hypocrite, and meet her with a smile, and laugh and talk with her as if we were the best of friends."

"And you don't deceive her at all!"

"Perhaps not. She doesn't deceive me, for I often am sure that she doesn't like me as she once did."

"Another thing, dear. A girl cannot win the one she loves by running after him. That may seem hard, but it is true. The law of our natures requires that the girl should be sought and not the seeker, and when a girl forgets this she merely lowers herself and repels the one she would attract. But that does not mean that she must be a cold statue or a wallflower, and a true girl can find many womanly ways of expressing her love when the

time comes. Dear, I am sorry for you! I thought I might be able to help you, but I fear I cannot do much. But I believe this, and perhaps it will help you: If he is the one for you, I think he will come to you; and if he is not, it is better that he should go away."

It seemed strange to Elsie afterward, but now that the subject had been opened up, she felt that she could tell this kindly old woman everything, and would receive sympathy, if not help—and just then she felt the need of sympathy more than anything else. She could not get that sympathy of Winnie, for Winnie was as much Inza's friend as she was hers.

The little room began to grow dark before she noticed it. Time had fled rapidly. She sprang up and began to get ready to go.

"It is so late!" she explained. "I had no idea I had stayed so long!"

"You will come again to-morrow?" the old woman pleaded.

"Yes," Elsie promised. "And every day until you are better."

CHAPTER XL.

HELP IN TIME OF NEED.

Elsie descended nervously to the street, for she had not dreamed that it was so late. Time had truly walked with seven-league boots while she was confiding her troubles to kindly old Mrs. Moran and receiving the sympathy which she so craved.

Bart Hodge had lingered on the corner above a long time, thinking that perhaps he ought to remain for Elsie, even though she had expressed no such desire, and also because he felt a pleasure in her company. But Bart had gone away at last. Elsie did not expect to see him, but she glanced quickly and nervously around, with a half-hope that he might still be near.

"Oh, dear!" she gasped. "The street looks so dark up there! I didn't realize how spooky it would seem down here in the night! I should think Mrs. Moran would have been afraid to live here! And there doesn't seem to be a car coming anywhere!"

She swung the empty basket on her right arm, gathered her skirts in her left hand, and, scarcely looking to the right or left, started at a quick pace toward the car line, where, on a corner, an electric lamp drove away the gloom.

Noisy children were still playing in the street. Now and then a man or a woman passed her. A hand-organ

ground dolefully a block below. But she could not hear the coming of a car.

"I shall not mind waiting under that lamp!" she thought.

Then she stopped shudderingly, as a young man came swinging toward her. He was shabby and disreputable-looking, and she fancied from his general appearance that he had been drinking. She was on the point of crossing the street to avoid him, when he leeringly placed himself in front of her.

"I'll take a kiss, sweetheart!" he begged.

Elsie gave a stifled scream of fright and started backward.

"Why, you needn't be afraid of me!" he said, coming toward her. "Just a kiss, sweetheart!"

Elsie slipped as she turned to run, but was up again in an instant. But the fall delayed her long enough for the ruffian to close the separating distance. She felt his hand on her shoulder. Then she screamed aloud in terror.

In answer to that scream a young man came quickly round a corner. He had seen the advance of the disreputable scoundrel, even before he heard Elsie's loud outcry. He was plump and apple-cheeked, and altogether cheery and breezy in manner and appearance. Elsie struck at the ruffian with the basket, trying to beat off his grasp, and as she did so she saw the young fellow rushing to her aid. She recognized him, too, though the light was poor. It was Jack Ready.

Ready had been down to the waterside, and was return-

ing late, walking at a good stiff pace for exercise, when he saw the girl and the ruffian. Though he did not at the time know that the girl was Elsie Bellwood, his chivalrous instincts led him to hasten to her defense, without stopping to consider the very evident fact that the other young man was taller and seemingly stronger in every way.

"Help!" Elsie gaspingly called. "Help! help!"

With a bound, Ready was at her side, and his hard, round fist, catching the ruffian in the face, caused him to release his hold and stumble backward.

"Are you hurt?" Ready anxiously asked.

"No, only scared! But look out!"

Elsie cried out in alarm, and Ready turned to face his antagonist, who was rushing on him in a murderous mood. Then Ready saw that it was the younger of the two disreputable men who had rolled the beer-barrel into the basement and had knocked him senseless when he ventured in there after it. Even as he lifted his hands to meet the rush of the young ruffian, Ready's mind went back to that occurrence of only the day before, and of its outcome.

From the moment in which he had hopped upon the beer-barrel and was knocked senseless until now Ready had not seen this man. On regaining consciousness, he had found the men gone, though the barrel of beer remained. They had been frightened away by the descent of a party of freshmen who were searching for their leader.

After that the beer had been returned to its owner, and

sophomores and freshmen alike had been compelled to listen to some unpleasant lecturing and to pay for all damages done.

"Refuse me if I tap you one very gently!" Ready chirped, cleverly dancing out of the way and planting a telling blow on the ruffian's nose. "It will do you good to draw a little of that claret."

"I'll kill you!" the young fellow howled, swinging at Ready with so huge a fist and with such terrible strength that if the blow had fallen the freshman would have been instantly knocked out.

But it did not fall. Ready again danced neatly out of the way and again planted a hammering blow on the scoundrel's nose, which now began to bleed freely. Elsie Bellwood was standing by in panting bewilderment, anxious for Ready's safety, yet not knowing what to do, but admiring his pluck, and grateful for his timely interference.

"It distresses me to hear you utter such gory sentiment!" Ready cried, striking again. "You think you are a thumper, my dear fellow! Just let us play that I'm Buster Kelley, and that you're taking lessons under me! It will be instructive and amusing!"

The younger children had run affrighted into the houses, but some of the older boys were approaching, drawn by that irresistible fascination which seems to emanate from a fight.

"I'll kill you!" the ruffian again exclaimed, lunging out blindly and wildly.

"Do have some originality in the style of your re-

marks!" Ready begged, dancing back and looking for another opening. "The man of originality is the man who wins. Now, you will observe that I do not twice strike you in the same way. That last time was on the cheek. This time——"

He landed again, with a jolting thump.

"——was in the eye! I'll show you how to reach the other eye, if you'll keep still a minute. I'm glad to be able to pay you my compliments, and to teach you this lesson at the same time!"

The young ruffian was slightly intoxicated, but not enough to hurt his fighting qualities. He had felt that he could pulverize this apple-cheeked student without half-trying. Now that he found Ready more than a match for him, he simply became wild. He fought by blind rushes, trying to break through Ready's shower of blows and close with his lithe antagonist in a hug that should at once end the combat. But Ready was surprisingly agile.

"If I get my hands on ye!" yelled the bewildered scamp.

"I'll be the lemon and you'll be the squeezer. Thanks, awfully! Now, I put one in the other eye! Didn't that jar you? The very latest slang for 'didn't that jar you?' is, 'didn't that bump you?' This with my left is a bumper! Just under the ear, but a little too high and not hard enough. Didn't that bump you?"

It seemed marvelous how Jack Ready could keep up this running fire of sarcastic comment and ply his fists at the same time, but he did, to Elsie's wondering delight.

"You see just how it is done! Oh, you don't see? I was thinking that your optics were getting sleepy and ready to draw their covers over them and retire for the night. This will help them along!"

"Look out!" Elsie suddenly and startlingly screamed.

Another man—an older man—had rushed out of an alley to the young ruffian's assistance.

"Stand up to him, Jim!"

"Jim," the younger man, seemed to receive new courage and strength from that cry. He came at Ready with a fierce rush, and Ready was compelled to face him, and could not turn to meet his new foe.

"I'm comin'," the older man yelled, and Ready recognized the voice as that of the older of the two who had rolled away the beer-barrel. "Knock 'im out, Jim! Don't let 'im do ye up! Break his head!"

Elsie Bellwood saw Jack Ready's danger. The sight gave her strength and determination. She rushed wildly at the older man, striking at his head with the basket.

Then a funny thing happened. The man ducked his head to get past her and to the assistance of his son—for the younger ruffian was his son—and in so doing ran his head and right shoulder into the basket. His right hand and arm had been outstretched at the moment, and Elsie's driving blow forced the basket down over the head and arm, until the handle was under the armpit and the body of the basket over the man's head. The blow turned him half-around, too, and, stumbling blindly from the pavement, he went rolling into the gutter, falling heavily on the rough cobblestones.

The basket was strong and of good workmanship, and it did not break under the strain, so the man could not get it off. And whenever he tried to get up the cobble-stones seemed to slip under his feet, and he went down again.

Ready heard the struggle, but did not know the cause. However, the fact that help for the young ruffian was at hand put more ginger than heretofore into Ready's good right arm and fist, and his next blow knocked the young scamp insensible into the gutter by the side of his father, who was scrambling and fuming at a great rate.

Ready turned, expecting to have to meet a new foe, and saw the comical predicament of the man who had sought to rush into the fray.

"A pig in a poke!" he laughed, pantingly putting his hands on his sides. "Shall I try to relieve him of the basket?"

"Oh, dear no!" Elsie exclaimed, starting toward the light. "Let's get away from here as quickly as we can!"

"Ta-ta!" chirped Ready. "See you later!"

Then he stepped very deliberately into the gutter and as deliberately kicked the man twice.

"Once for that knock-out blow you gave me on the barrel! Once for this present instance! If we ever meet again I'll double the dose. I trust you enjoy it, and I assure you that it is a great satisfaction to me."

The other rascal was trying to get on his feet, having regained his consciousness in a surprising manner.

Turning from the older man, who was swearing and howling and uttering awful threats, Ready walked to the

younger man and deliberately kicked him in the same way.

Elsie was running on toward the light, stopping now and then to look back. She did not ask herself whether she approved or disapproved of these acts of the freshman leader. She was wildly and nervously anxious to get away from the spot, and had no thought for anything else.

"Beg your pardon for that exhibition of spiteful temper!" said Ready, as he joined her. "But I couldn't resist the temptation. I have always been taught to pay my debts, and I certainly felt that to be a debt. Now, we'll leave this alluring atmosphere behind us."

"Yes! yes!" Elsie panted. "Let us hurry!"

"Oh, they won't follow us out into the well-lighted street! And, besides, I imagine they know when they have had enough. They will not care to meet me again!"

And Ready thrust out his chest and gave it such a tremendous thump with his fist that he set himself coughing violently.

"Refuse me!" he murmured. "Nearly ruptured my left ventrical."

CHAPTER XLI.

FRANK MERRIWELL'S FOOTBALL.

Jack Ready accompanied Elsie Bellwood to the residence of the Honorable Fairfax Lee, for she and Inza were still the guests of Winnie Lee.

Winnie met her at the door, bubbling over with enthusiasm.

"Come right in, dear!" she exclaimed. "I'm so glad to see you! We've been planning a pleasant surprise for Merry!"

She held in her hands a football. Elsie could hardly think of anything but her unpleasant adventure on leaving Mrs. Moran's. She had meant to speak of it the first thing.

"What is it?" she asked, staring at the football.

Winnie laughed, as she took Elsie by the arm.

"A football, of course!"

"I know a football when I see one, and you know that I do. I meant the surprise which you and Inza are planning for Frank."

She succeeded in concealing it from her friend, but she could not hide from herself the fact that her heart was distressed by a feeling of jealousy.

"I planned it," Winnie confessed, "but Inza is to help pay for the ball, because she wants to have a part in making the present, and, of course, you will want to do the same!"

"Yes!" said Elsie, not knowing what else to say.

"It is the season for outdoor work and practise now, you know," Winnie trilled on, as they walked down the hall. "The men have been kicking football for some time now. Frank and his set are practising right along. You didn't see them the other day, did you?"

"No," said Elsie.

"Oh, you missed it! It was just beautiful work! They practise in the spring now, you know, just the same as in the fall, to keep themselves up to the work."

In Elsie's mind these new thoughts were combined with the exciting recollections of the fight between Ready and the ruffians in the narrow street down toward the waterside. She could not get away from that.

"You don't seem to be very enthusiastic!" Winnie remarked.

"Oh, but I am interested! I was thinking of something else, that I want to tell you all about directly."

"I saw this football in the window of a dealer yesterday. It's a beautiful one, isn't it? I felt like doing something for Frank for what he did for Buck—not as a payment, you know, but to let him understand that I appreciate it. And then it occurred to me that you and Inza might want to join with me in making the present. We can have the name 'Merriwell' put on it in gold letters. We might call it 'Merriwell's Mascot.' Inza must make the presentation speech. She's gifted that way, you know."

"Yes," assented Elsie, as if in a dream. "It will be

lovely. And I shall be very glad to help you with it, dear!"

Winnie burst with her into the room where Inza was.

"She thinks the plan is just lovely, and we'll have the name 'Merriwell' put on it, and you can make the presentation speech! I know he can't help being pleased. And all the members of the 'flock' will be pleased!"

There was a pathetic note in the tone. Buck Badger was not a member of the "flock."

Elsie looked at Inza, the words of Mrs. Moran in her ears, and thought how handsome she was.

"She is a queen!" she thought. "What a lovely dark complexion! And that carriage and figure! And that glorious dark hair and those eyes! My washed-out, carroty head, which some people rave over, can't be compared with it! If I was a man, I should fall in love with Inza Burrage. But as I am a woman—and her rival—I almost hate her! But I could never blame Frank for caring more for her than he does for me. It might break my heart, but I couldn't blame him!"

The mental confession seemed to be forced upon her. She did not want to say those things, even in her heart, but it seemed that she must. She felt that they were true, and she must not deny the truth to herself.

"We'll go down in the morning," said Inza, the rich coloring coming into her cheeks and making them bloom like blush-roses. "The football-player doesn't live who wouldn't be pleased with that as a present. I only wish that I had been bright enough to think of it!"

"You gave him those winged skates," Winnie reminded.

"And I have never given him anything," said Elsie self-reproachfully.

"We are all to give him this," reminded Winnie. She dropped into a chair and looked admiringly at the football.

"What was it you wanted to tell?" she asked, suddenly recalled to the fact that Elsie had a story.

"Oh, yes!" said Elsie, her heart-beats quickening as she returned in imagination to the brutal fellow she had encountered in the narrow street, and to the magnificent fight made by Jack Ready.

It was an interesting story, and she told it interestingly, not omitting the funny part concerning the basket in which the elder man became so strangely stuck.

"We'll have to give Mr. Jack Ready something!" said Inza laughingly. "But I'm glad, dear, that he was there to come to your assistance."

"I shall be afraid to go down there again!" Elsie shiveringly declared. "I haven't much more courage than a kitten, and when I get scared that way I lose what little I have!"

"It was courageous in you to attack that man that way!" said Inza. "I hope you don't call that cowardice!"

"Well, it wasn't courage. I wanted to run all the time. My heart was right in my mouth. When people are courageous they go about a thing like that boldly. I should have run away if I had dared. But I saw the man leaping at Ready, and what else could I do but

try to keep him back? Anybody would have done that. Even a mouse will fight if you crowd it into a corner!"

"Well, I call it courage!" Inza declared. "You're timid, Elsie, but you're not cowardly. A coward would have run, in spite of Jack Ready's danger!"

"You would not have run!" said Elsie.

"I will go with you the next time you go down, if you'd like," Inza volunteered. "I should have gone this afternoon only I was out when you started."

Elsie's face sobered. She felt, somehow, that she did not want Inza to accompany her to Mrs. Moran's. She wanted to go alone. She wanted the sympathy which Mrs. Moran alone seemed able to give, and that sympathy could not be bestowed by the old woman in the presence of Inza.

"To-morrow morning we'll go down and present this ball to Frank," said Winnie, again looking at the football. "It won't take long to have the lettering put on. I know where to go for that. And after that we can go right on down. Think up your prettiest speech, Inza."

"I will!" Inza promised.

And she did. The name "Merriwell" was put on the ball in gold letters the next morning, and the ball was presented to Frank in his room, in the presence of nearly every member of the "flock," in a sparkling speech by Inza.

Harry Rattleton pushed all sputteringly forward, his honest heart all aglow, as soon as Frank had expressed his thanks.

"It is indeed a mascot," he declared, looking at it admiringly, "and I value it more than anything I possess."

"We all feel monored as well as Herriwell—I mean we all feel honored as well as Merriwell. The present was made to him by our three best girl friends."

"Our three best girls!" squeaked Bink.

"Three girl friends," Harry continued, glaring at Bink. "Fellows, let's give 'em three cheers!"

They were given with a will.

CHAPTER XLII.

A MURDEROUS BLOW.

Jack Ready did not expect soon to encounter those ruffians again, but he did, only two days later, and under circumstances that were calculated to make a lasting impression on his mind. He had asked Frank Merriwell for the loan of a football, and was sent to Frank's room alone, to find one, being told by Frank where to look.

"Just leave the key in the door," said Merry. "I will be up there in a minute."

Ready had taken the new football, with the name "Merriwell" on it, instead of the one that Frank intended he should have. We never know what strange things may come from one little act. Jack Ready did not dream how closely his fate was to be bound up in that lettered football when he took it from Merry's room. He thought only of taking the handsome bit of pigskin with him and enjoying himself by kicking it about in the pleasant spring weather.

His intentions at first were to stray not far from the campus. But he walked on by and by, until he found himself fairly beyond the suburbs, and in a somewhat unfamiliar section.

The prospect there was so pleasing that he was in no hurry to go away. He lay down at the foot of a tree and indulged in day-dreams as he looked over the surrounding landscape. He had felt warm walking, but he

found it cool lying down, for spring was not yet past her treacherous period in which one finds winter and summer often intermarried. By and by he rose and began to kick the football about. This warmed him up.

"I believe a kick like that ought to win goal!" he thought, somewhat proudly, as he sent the pigskin whirling through the air. "I can play football as well as I can play baseball or pull an oar. And I can pull an oar as well as any man in the freshman crews."

This was true, and Ready's modesty did not require him to set an undervaluation on his abilities. Ready was very clever, and he knew it quite well. He was astonished and somewhat startled, when, as he looked after the ball, he saw directly in the narrow path and coming toward him the identical pair of ruffians with whom he had already had so much trouble. They seemed to see and recognize him at the same moment.

He quite forgot to watch the ball, as he looked at the two men. He had never before seen them in broad daylight. This better view did not improve their appearance. They were certainly a villainous pair. And they looked as much alike, except in age, as two monkeys. The only difference that Ready could note was that the elder man seemed to have a longer body and shorter legs. But this might have been only apparent and due to his clothing.

The next thing Jack Ready observed was that a dog which had been trotting along with them was chasing after the football. Even as Ready looked, the dog seemed trying to set his teeth in it as if for the purpose

of shaking and tearing at it. Ready started toward the dog. That beautiful ball was not his, and he did not intend to have it marked and scarred by the teeth of that mongrel cur if he could help it.

"Hi, there!" he yelled. "Let that ball alone."

Tom Haskins, the father, laughed hoarsely from his hairy throat.

"Tear it up, Tige, if you want to!" he commanded. "We'll see what he'll do 'bout it! Tear it up!"

Jim Haskins, the son, slapped his hand in glee. One eye was swollen and half-shut, and there were various cuts on his face, showing where it had come in contact with Jack Ready's fists.

"I don't care about being doubled on by those two scamps alone," thought Ready, as he ran toward the dog. "I'll just keep away from them. But that dog sha'n't tear up Merriwell's football if I can help it. I'll split the cur's head open and then sprint for it!"

He picked up a heavy club as he ran along. It was a large spoke from a heavy farm wagon, as he discovered when his fingers closed on it. A better weapon in the shape of a club for offense or defense could not have been found, and his heart warmed.

The dog had run at right angles straight away from the narrow path. It was chewing at the football in a way to throw Ready into a rage. The ruffianly owners of the dog, seeing Ready's belligerent intentions, started also in that direction.

Ready reached the dog first.

"Let that ball alone!" he sharply commanded, giving the dog a kick. "Drop it!"

The dog did drop the ball, and sprang for Jack Ready's throat. But Ready was not taken altogether by surprise. He swung the heavy club and struck the dog down. But the dog leaped up and came at him again. There was a good deal of bulldog in the cur's composition. Jack beat it down. It leaped once more, seeming to mind the heavy blow no more than if it had been given by a slight walking-cane.

Ready hurled the dog back with his left arm, losing a section of coat-sleeve, which remained in the dog's mouth. Then he struck again, with so true an aim and with such tremendous force that the dog dropped to the grass with a broken skull, the blood foaming out of its mouth over the football.

Crack!

Tom Haskins' fist struck Jack Ready in the back of the neck at the base of the brain. The blow was a terrible one—almost enough to dislocate Ready's neck. A blur of blood, turning to darkness, swam before Ready's eyes, as he threw up his hands and fell limply on the dog's body. The older man rushed on him and kicked him again and again.

"That's for the kicking you give me in the street!" he howled.

Jim Haskins kicked the football angrily, sending it far away in the grass; then rushed up and sent his foot with crushing force against Ready's back.

"And that's to pay for what you give me!"

"He's killed Tige!" the old man grumbled. "And I wouldn't took ten dollars for Tige!"

He roughly threw Ready aside and dragged out the struggling brute. As he did so, the dog gave a convulsive gasp and stiffened, then grew limp.

"He's killed Tige!" Tom Haskins ominously exclaimed. "I'll murder him for that! Tige could whip any dog in New Haven! I wouldn't took ten dollars for him!"

Jim Haskins turned and once more kicked Jack Ready.

"I b'lieve you've killed the feller!" he cried, in a startled tone.

"Don't care if I have!" Tom Haskins snarled, bending over the body of the dog. "Tige was wuth any two such dudes!"

He was in a transport of rage. Picking up the club, he rushed with it toward the insensible form of Jack Ready, as if for the purpose of braining him. Jim Haskins caught his father's hand.

"No!" he said. "We don't want to stick our necks into no halter! I'm afeared you've already done for him. You'd be certain to, if you hit him with that!"

The stick fell. The face of the elder man whitened. The words of Jim Haskins brought him back to a knowledge of the fact that there are laws and officers in this land of the free, and that crime seldom goes long unpunished. He had felt the cold iron of the police on his wrists more than once, and had done time in more than

one State institution. He was not anxious to repeat the experiment.

His face seemed a dirty, whitish-gray, and his short legs shook, as he looked down at the motionless form of Jack Ready. Jim Haskins dropped heavily down at Ready's side and tried to find his pulse. His clumsy and untrained fingers sought in vain. Tom Haskins watched him anxiously.

"If he'd let the dog alone!" the father shiveringly grumbled. "Why didn't he let the dog alone? Tige wouldn't 'a' bothered him if he'd let him alone!"

"I don't know if he's dead, or not," said Jim Haskins, glancing about to see if they were observed. "But if he ain't, like enough he'll die! I couldn't find no pulse. It's resky to hit a feller in the back o' the neck the way you hit him!"

The older man also looked anxiously round. He felt better when he was sure that no one was in sight, and that his deed had been seen by no human eyes.

"We'll let him lay," he said. "We'll let him lay, and cut tracks before anybody sees us or knows that we've been here. But fust we'd better drag Tige away. He might be reco'nized, ye know. We'll drag Tige away, and git back into town soon's we kin. Then we'll lay low. If the young feller don't die, all right. If he does die, who is to say that we know anything about it?"

The plan was so promising that he clapped a hand to one of Tige's hind legs and began to pull. The other man took hold of the other hind leg, and thus dragging

the dead dog, they hurried toward some bushes that were growing at a considerable distance away.

Finally they picked up the dog by the hind and fore legs, so that the dragging marks might not be followed, and hastened on, disappearing after a time from the view of any one in the little path, or in that particular section of the countryside, just beyond the suburbs. And Jack Ready lay unconscious in the warm spring sunshine.

A bird flew, with musically whistling wing, into the branches of a tree near. It was a bird not very familiar to New England eyes—a turtle-dove. Then its soft, mournful note rose like a cry of distress.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JACK READY.

Jack Ready was strangely missing. No one knew what had become of him. He had borrowed Merriwell's gift football, and that was the last seen of him.

"Stole the football and cleared out," wildly suggested Bink Stubbs. "Mad because it wasn't presented to him for his rescue of Elsie!"

"But seriously, fellows, this is no joking matter," urged Frank. "Ready has been gone now nearly two days. I asked about him awhile ago. Not a soul knows where he is. None of his chums have seen him. He hasn't been to classes. He hasn't attended chapel. Where is he? I'm really alarmed, for those ruffians that he fought down there by Mrs. Moran's may have tried to even the score. I've been uneasy about him all day."

"What are the freshmen doing?" asked Jim Hooker.

"I was told that they are organizing and sending out searching-parties. But they don't know where to search. The police have been notified, too, I think."

This from Jack Diamond.

"Bother the police!" exclaimed Danny Griswold. "If I wanted to lose myself from mortal eyes, I'd go down to a police-station and sit down in the first chair I came to."

The disappearance of Jack Ready was the subject of

the talk at the fence, and at Traeger's and Morey's. It invaded the clubs, and troubled the instructors. The president of the college heard of it and began to ask anxious questions which nobody could answer. And thus the night slipped into another day and still no news of Ready.

It fell to the fortune of Frank Merriwell, Bruce Browning, and Jack Diamond to recognize the first clue. They did not discover it. That was the lot of a country boy, making his way into town by the little-used path which Ready and the Haskinses had trod. The boy saw the football on the grass some distance from the path. The Haskinses had hurriedly looked for that football, but in their nervous haste had not been able to find it. The boy read the name, "Merriwell," on it, and he saw the dried blood-stains. He had heard nothing of the disappearance of Ready, but a football with blood-stains on it seemed uncanny, and he bore it on into the city, after carefully looking round without discovering anything from which the blood could have come.

Merry, Bruce, and Jack Diamond were strolling out that same afternoon, thinking and talking of the vanishing of the leader of the freshmen, when they were approached by this farmer's boy with the missing football. They were in athletic suits, and had been engaged in football practise.

"Take us to the place where you found it," said Merry.

The sight of those dried blood-stains, while they thoroughly roused him, filled him with dread. He believed that the blood had come from the veins of Jack Ready.

The country boy guided them to the spot where he had found the football, and a search was begun, though it looked unpromising. Jim Haskins had kicked the football to a considerable distance from the point where the fight took place.

But Frank Merriwell was as keen as a hound on the scent. The search was conducted under his direction in ever-widening circles. At last he stopped and bent down as if closely examining something. When he arose he held up the section of Ready's coat-sleeve which the dog had torn away.

"Ready wore that coat the morning he came to me for the football," Merriwell positively declared. "There has been some kind of a struggle here, too, as you can see. And right here is a pool of blood. Probably here is where the football got those stains. There is no doubt that Ready had a fight here, and I would be willing to risk big money that the fight was with the men he had trouble with near Mrs. Moran's. He told me they were the same ones that knocked him out in the basement!"

The heavy wagon-spoke had been taken away by Jim Haskins.

Jack Diamond found the trail made by the Haskinses when they dragged the dog away, and began to follow that. He was as fully aroused as Merriwell. Even the sluggish blood of Bruce Browning quickened.

"The trail ends here!" Diamond announced, coming to a halt at the point where the body of the dog had been

lifted by the two men and carried. The farmer's boy was fairly dancing in his excitement.

"If we on'y had a bloodhound!" he exclaimed.

He had been to see an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" not long before, and for a whole week had been dreaming of bloodhounds and floating rivers of ice-cakes and escaping Elizas. This exciting discovery and search were even better than an "Uncle Tom's Cabin," for they were real and he had a part in them.

The boy ran out to where Diamond had stopped. He dropped down and peered into the grass roots as if he would dig up evidence from the very earth. Then, looking up, his eyes fell on the bushes into which the body of the dog had been carried. He turned round and glanced at Merriwell, who was coming on at a rapid walk, as if for consent. Merriwell was also looking at the bushes.

"Go on!" said Frank, admiring the spirit of the boy. "They went that way. If there was anything to be hidden, those bushes would be a natural hiding-place."

With this permission the boy bounded on like a deer. He vanished out of sight in the bushes. Scarcely a moment passed before there came a resounding whoop. Then the boy appeared, beckoning wildly.

Merriwell had dreaded the revelation which the bushes might make. When the boy appeared, beckoning in that way, he feared the very worst. But instead of voicing his fears, he broke into a run, and was followed by Diamond, and more slowly by Bruce.

"It's a dog," said the boy, "and he's stiffer'n a nail!"

The words took off the keen edge of Frank's fears. He followed the boy into the bushes, and there found the body of Tige, lying where it had been placed by the ruffians.

"Look round and see if you can find anything else," he urged, as he stooped above the body of the dog—a command which the boy eagerly obeyed.

Merriwell had the football in his hands, and he now scanned it. Jack Diamond came dashing through the bushes. Merriwell was still looking at some marks and scratches he had observed before on the ball and which he could not understand.

"Marks of the dog's teeth, I should say?" he asked, exhibiting them to Jack.

"Sure!" Diamond declared, staring round as if he half-expected to behold the body of Jack Ready.

"Now, if we knew whose dog this is!" said Frank, trying to puzzle out the meaning of the things they had discovered. "By Jove!" he muttered, "this football is proving itself to be a mascot in the very highest sense of the term!"

Diamond joined the boy in his search. Bruce came panting through the bushes and joined Merry. Nothing more was to be discovered in the bushes, though they were thoroughly searched.

"I feel better, anyway!" Merry declared. "I begin to think that the blood on this football came from that dog. Perhaps Ready had a fight with him. I think he did. But the dog wasn't alone. The dog was dragged to the bushes, but not by Jack Ready. Something seri-

ous befell Ready. Otherwise he would not have left the football!"

Jack Diamond came back from a search beyond the bushes and took the football, closely examining the marks on it.

"I've got to go!" the boy reluctantly announced. "But I'll come back and hunt to-morrow! Be you going to hunt to-morrow?"

"Likely," said Merry, "if we don't succeed in our search to-day."

He put his hand into his pocket, and taking out a bright silver dollar gave it to the boy. The boy's eyes rounded like saucers. He had never possessed so much money before.

"That is to pay you for what you have done this morning. If you find out anything more, come with the news to that address."

Merry put a card into the boy's hands. The boy's eyes rounded again.

"Say!" he gasped. "If you're Frank Merriwell for sure, I don't want no dollar, I don't. I'd work my legs off for you!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

MERRIWELL'S LIFE CHAIN.

Jack Diamond approached an abandoned well and peered down into it with a queer feeling. The search had been continued after the departure of the boy.

"I am almost afraid to look into a place like this for fear I may see Ready's body!" Jack muttered to himself, as he peeped down into the dark hole.

There were some rotten boards round the well, and above it a broken platform or scaffolding. Work on the well had apparently been abandoned before its completion.

Diamond knelt on one of these boards and bent far over. Suddenly the board broke, and he was precipitated head first into the mouth of the well. The football, which he carried, slipped from his fingers, and dropped down out of sight; but Diamond caught hold of a thick bunch of grass and saved himself from going into the well head first. But his feet and body plunged on downward, and the staying bunch of grass being torn from its place by the violent wrench, Diamond also slipped downward out of sight.

Merriwell and Browning saw Jack disappear, and ran to his assistance. Frank was the first to arrive at the mouth of the well.

"Hello, Jack!" he called. "Are you hurt?"

"I'm all right, I think," came the answer. "But I can't stand it long!"

Merriwell threw himself flat on his face. In a moment his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom. Then he saw Jack Diamond clinging with both hands to a projecting bit of ledge a few feet below. Farther down, in the water, was the football. Diamond's legs were also in the water to his knees.

Diamond's face was upturned, and he saw Merriwell as soon as Frank threw himself down and looked in.

"I can't hang here long!" Jack gasped. "And I'm afraid to let go, for I don't know how deep the water is. And I can't climb up!"

Merriwell saw that the sides of the well were perpendicular, offering not the slightest foothold.

"You couldn't draw yourself up to the ledge where your hands are?" he asked.

"No. I tried to!"

Dim as the light was, Merry could see that Diamond's face was red with the strain.

"Just hold on a minute!" he urged, a plan for the rescue of Diamond quickly forming in his mind. He had heard Bruce dash up, puffing like a porpoise, and he recalled the broken scaffolding. The plan would work, he believed, if the scaffolding would hold. Anyway, it must be attempted, before Diamond dropped into the water.

"Climb upon the scaffold, Bruce!" Frank suggested.

He began to mount the scaffold himself, as he said it.

Then he gave Bruce a hand and helped him up. To Frank's delight, the creaky platform held them.

"Now, if it will stand the weight of another! Diamond is in the well, holding on to a bit of ledge by his hands. His feet are in the water, and he'll go in all over if we can't soon get him out. Take hold of my feet now, as I slide over the edge of the platform, and lower me into the well!"

Before Bruce could ask a question, Frank was lowering himself head first over the side of the platform.

"I can get hold of his hands, I think!" Merry called. "Take my feet and lower me right down! Quick, now!"

Then Browning comprehended. For a wonder, he seemed to become almost as lithe and active as Merry. He caught Merry's feet and legs and quickly, yet carefully, lowered Frank into the well.

"Can you put me down a foot farther?" Merry called. Bruce dropped to his stomach and Frank's feet went still lower.

Jack understood what was being tried, but he said not a word, nor made a motion. He could not stretch up a hand without letting go the ledge, and his hold on it seemed too precarious to venture to take away even a finger.

But there was no need. Merriwell caught Diamond's wrists in a strong, firm grip.

"Haul away!" he shouted.

The situation was one of extreme peril. Everything depended on the strength of the platform and upon the lifting power of Bruce Browning. If the platform broke,

both Browning and Merriwell would be dropped into the icy water, which looked to be very deep. And if, on the other hand, Bruce could not lift them both, Diamond could not be rescued in that way, and would be forced to fall into the water before help in any other shape could be got to him.

"Carefully!" Merry cautioned.

It was a remarkable feat of strength which Browning was called on to attempt. As he sought to straighten and get to a kneeling position, every muscle in his strong young body seemed strained like knotted whipcord. But he drew up his burden inch by inch. Slowly Merriwell's feet came above the rim of the well. There were jerks and slips, as Browning shifted his position to get new purchases, and these wrenched every bone in Merry's body. But Frank hung to Diamond's wrists.

At length Browning got one foot under himself. Then Merry's feet ascended faster. Up, up, up! The old scaffold creaked and groaned, but it was equal to the strain. When built, it had been made strong enough to support many hundreds of pounds of soil. Its supports had sunk deeply into the earth since that time, so that it was much nearer the surface of the ground.

"I can make it now!" Bruce grunted, shifting his grip.

"All right!" Merry called.

Frank's gymnasium practise stood him in good stead. More than once, hanging in this position from horizontal bar or trapeze, he had lifted weights heavier than Diamond.

Bruce shifted once more and again began to lift. Then Merriwell clung with tenacious grip to Diamond, while Bruce drew them both out of the well. Not until Jack's body was resting securely on the platform did Frank let go his hold.

"You're the champion strong man of Yale!" he said, rolling over and springing to his feet. Browning had dropped back, red in the face, and panting from his tremendous exertions.

"Don't care to play the strong-man act any more than I have to," he grunted. "All right, Diamond?"

Jack scrambled up.

"Yes, thanks to you and Merry! But my feet feel as if they had been in ice. And I don't believe I could have held out a minute longer. That tumble wrenched me and seemed to take my strength. I was scared a bit, for a minute or so, fellows!"

He looked toward the hole again.

"I'm glad you're all right!" said Frank, looking also again into the well. "You left the ball down there. Was there anything else down there?"

He was thinking of Jack Ready.

"Not unless it is in the bottom of the well!" Jack answered, also with gruesome accent. "We ought to find out if there is anything there!"

He looked at his squeezed wrists, then sat down and began to take off his shoes, for his feet felt as if they were freezing. Bruce lay back on the boards, breathing heavily.

"I guess I'll have a smoke, after that!" he grumbled, drawing out his pipe.

"And I'll build a fire for Diamond," said Frank, getting up and hurrying away to look for some dry wood.

"We'll get a rope and ladder and explore that well to-morrow!" Bruce declared, looking down at the grass-grown mouth as he scratched his match. Diamond glanced quickly about, with a startled exclamation.

"What was that?" he asked. "Didn't you hear a whistle? There it is again."

A whistle that sounded like Jack Ready's, though it sounded indistinct and far away, seemed to come from the depths of the well.

Diamond crawled quickly to the mouth of the well and bent his head in a listening attitude. Bruce stopped trying to light his pipe and listened, too. But the whistle did not come again.

Diamond looked at his friend.

"Didn't that come from the mouth of the well? And didn't it sound like Ready's whistle?"

"I thought so," Bruce assented. "But it's nonsense, you know. If Jack Ready is in that well, he's dead! It was just the wind. You can hear it singing through the grass here. It fooled us."

When Merriwell came back they told him what they fancied they had heard.

"It must have been the wind, as Bruce says," getting up and staring into the well. "But we'll look into that well again to-morrow. We'll want to get that football, anyway."

A rousing fire was built, and, while Diamond thawed out, Bruce smoked and all talked.

After Diamond replaced his shoes there was a further search, which yielded nothing, and they returned into the city, resolved on exploring the depths of the well in the morning.

Hodge and Rattleton were with them the next day, together with Danny Griswold and Bink Stubbs, Joe Gamp and Dismal Jones. No doubt Ephraim Gallup and Hans Dunnerwurst would also have been along, if they had not already left New Haven. Paul Rains, too, had suddenly departed for Cambridge, which he liked better than New Haven, and where he had friends in Harvard, a college which he thought much superior to Yale.

For the benefit of those who had not been in the search the previous day, Merriwell led the way to the point where the football had been found, and from that to the bushes where they had discovered the body of the dog.

Here they were treated to a surprise. The body of the dog was no longer there. Nor were there any indications to tell what had become of it. Something or somebody had apparently carried it away, without leaving any marks behind.

This discovery hurried them on to the old well. A rope ladder was lowered, and Frank Merriwell went down into the well.

"Fellows," he cried, in a startled voice, "the football is gone, too!"

CHAPTER XLV.

JACK READY'S PRISON.

When Jack Ready came to himself, he did not know where he was. A candle stuck on an old soap-box revealed the outlines of a cramped room, which seemed to be more cave than house, and which was pervaded with a wet and moldy smell that was almost sickening.

Ready was lying on some boards. These served to lift him from the damp clay that seemed to constitute the floor, but they increased the aches and pains that tortured him. He felt sore all over, from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. When he tried to turn to get a better look at the place, heavy pains shot through his sides and through the back of his head. He could not at once recollect recent events, and was at a total loss to account for his present whereabouts.

But memory began to return slowly. He recalled by degrees the fight with the dog. Then he remembered the blow on the neck which had brought darkness and oblivion.

"I wonder where I am?" he thought, straining again to look about.

His movements caused a motion in the farther corner of the cavelike place. A man got up from another bed of boards and came to him. The man was Jim Haskins.

"Hello!" said Haskins. "Comin' round, eh? I began to think that p'r'aps you wasn't goin' to. You've

been 'bout as good as dead for awhile—a good long while, too!"

"My genial friend, will you kindly tell me where I am?" Ready begged, but his chirp lacked a good deal of its old spontaneity and cheeriness.

"You are right here, an' I'm right here with you!"

"Thanks for the information. I thought we were somewhere else. I am glad I was mistaken."

"And you'll stay here until I git ready to let you go!"

"Thanks, awfully! It's pleasant to have little things like this settled for you. I suppose my board bill is arranged for?"

Jim Haskins did not know how to take this chirping, cheerful optimist. He sat down on the soap-box and looked at Ready.

"It's none o' your business why I am keepin' you here!" he bluntly observed. "I'm doin' it just for fun!"

But Ready wanted more information. He looked round inquiringly.

"I see nothing of the other man, nor of the dog."

Jim Haskins' face took on an ugly scowl.

"We'll git along better if you say nothin' about that dog!"

"And the man?"

"Well, he ain't here, as you can see. That's enough for you to know!"

"You are very kind," chirped Ready. "Could I have a little quail on toast this morning? Or is it morning?"

He tried to get out his watch, which was still in his pocket, and found that his arms were so stiff and sore he

could hardly move them. At last he drew out the watch and looked at it. It had run down and stopped. It had never stopped before, so Ready knew it had run down, and he distinctly remembered winding it. A good deal more time had gone by than he had dreamed.

He tried to roll off the boards. He rolled back again, when he realized how wet the clay floor was; and then struggled into a sitting posture.

"Butter and rolls will do, if you haven't the quail on toast!" he said, looking inquiringly at Haskins. "Is this house American plan or European? I'm hungry!"

He was indeed ravenously hungry.

"And thirsty! A bottle of your best champagne, if you please!"

Jim Haskins slouched heavily from the candle-box and disappeared. He was no sooner out of sight than Ready was on his feet, though he could hardly stand, and made his way shakily toward the small door which he saw before him. He found it of thick, heavy boards, and padlocked.

His head began to spin round. He turned to crawl back to his pallet of boards, when Jim Haskins reappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as he had disappeared.

"No use foolin' with that!" he growled. "You couldn't git through that door in a month!"

"I was merely inspecting the style of architecture," said Ready.

Haskins held in his hands a rusty oyster-can, to which

was attached a dirty twine string. The oyster-can was dripping, and was full of water.

Ready grasped it and drank eagerly. The water seemed to give him strength and to drive away the terrible pain that hammered in the back of his head.

"Thanks, awfully!" he gasped, handing back the empty can. "First-class Adam's ale. Now, if you've anything half as good to eat!"

The man went to the soap-box and took from a shelf in it a bit of stale bread and some meat. Unpalatable as it seemed, Ready ate this as greedily as he had swallowed the water. All the while he was watching and thinking and wondering.

Jim Haskins looked at Ready in his dull way, thinking, too. Haskins was thinking of the events which had induced him to bring Ready to this hidden retreat. He had known the place well, for he and his father had once occupied it as a sort of burglars' den. It had originally been intended for a cave or cellar, and was built by the crank who had started the well into which Jack Diamond had gone with the bloody football—both well and cave having been long since abandoned by the projector and forgotten by the community.

Jim Haskins, in spite of his depravity and general worthlessness, had in his heart a tender spot for his drunken, burglarious old father. This had induced him to bring about a change in their plans after they had dragged the dead dog into the bushes.

Tom Haskins was becoming more and more terrified by the possible consequences of the blow he had dealt

Jack Ready when they reached the bushes, and Jim had volunteered to return and bear Ready away also, thus giving his father a better chance to get out of New Haven without arrest.

After thinking the matter over and considering the possible actions of the police, he had borne Ready on his strong shoulders to this den, which was but a short distance from the old well, and connected with it by a narrow underground tunnel. And there he had since kept Ready, who was unconscious all of the time until his reawakening, and wildly delirious and even raving at times. It had been a terrible vigil for Jim Haskins!

As Ready sat now munching the dry bread, a strange sound penetrated to them. It did not seem to come from beyond the door, but from the rear of the cave. Jim Haskins' dirty face changed, and he hastened away, disappearing in the darkness as before.

Ready continued to munch his bread, but listened. After a little he seemed to hear a hum as of voices. This continued for some time. Finally these appeared to cease. Jim Haskins came back, much agitated.

"Those must have been voices of people!" Ready concluded. "Perhaps of the police!"

Then he thrust his fingers into his mouth and blew a shrill blast, which he repeated again, in spite of the fact that Jim Haskins leaped at him with a savage oath and beat down his hands.

"Do that ag'in," Haskins hissed, "an' it will be the worse for ye!"

The voices did not sound again, and Ready felt that

it would not be wise to further anger Haskins at that time. He began to feel sick and lay down again on the boards. Then, after a long interval of unsatisfactory thought, mingled with some questions which received no satisfactory answers, he fell asleep.

When he awoke he was surprised. The football with Merriwell's name on it was in the little room, together with the body of the dead dog. Jim Haskins, alarmed by the search made the previous day by Merriwell and his friends, had brought the dog there in the night, while Ready was sleeping, and had likewise fished the football out of the old well. If he had been wiser, he probably would have let both remain as they were.

"Mornin'!" he grunted from his seat on the candle-box. To Ready he seemed to have been sitting there all the while.

"Then it is morning, is it?" Ready chirped. "Thanks! I notice you have a new candle, too! I hope they will long hold out to burn, for morning is just like midnight down here, as far as I can see!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

READY'S RESCUE.

Merriwell's statement that the football was gone seemed a most surprising one.

"How could it have got out of here?" he asked. "Somebody must have——"

He stopped. A whistle sounded. The sound seemed blown into his ear from under the ledge to which Jack Diamond had clung the previous day. Then he thought he heard a scrambling noise, and again the whistling came.

Bruce Browning and Jack Diamond, he remembered, had reported the previous day that they thought they heard a whistling from the depths of the well. The idea had seemed preposterous. But he could not doubt his own ears. He swung on the rope ladder, waiting for the sound to come again, but it was not repeated. Something kept him from calling on his friends above.

When the sound was not heard again, he stooped down and looked under the ledge. All was perfect blackness; but when he thrust out his hand it found vacancy instead of the wall of the well. The curbing had been broken away on that side, and there seemed to be a hole.

Merriwell had brought a pole into the well with him for the purpose of prodding about in the water. He thrust it down, and to his surprise found that the water was not deep. If Diamond had dropped into it he would

not have been drowned, unless he had gone in head first. Then Frank thrust an end of the pole into the black hole under the ledge. He could not get it in far, for the pole was too long to lie crosswise in the well.

Having made these explorations, he climbed hurriedly up the ladder.

"There is a mystery down there!" he said, as coolly as if making the most ordinary statement. "There is a hole or a tunnel under that ledge. A whistling sound came out of it. I could swear it was Jack Ready's whistle!"

"We heard it!" said Rattleton. "We were wondering why you didn't speak about it. You kept still, and that made us think maybe we hadn't heard anything."

"Lower some of these strongest boards down to me!" Frank ordered, putting his feet again on the rope ladder. "The water isn't deep, and I think I can set some of them up so that we can stand on them. I'm going into that tunnel! I believe Jack Ready is in there!"

By putting the lower ends of several boards into the bottom of the well and resting the upper ends against the sides of the well, Frank Merriwell contrived to find a resting-place for his feet, which enabled him to leave the ladder and crawl into the hole. He had some matches in his pocket.

As he was leaving the ladder he felt it shake and knew that some one else was descending.

"They will all come down!" he thought. And they did. Rattleton and Diamond and Hodge were the first to reach his side.

"Plenty of matches when Browning gets here," he said, and he struck a match and flashed its light around.

The narrow tunnel lay straight before them. Without waiting for the descent of the others, Merry struck another match, and with these unsubstantial torches the party was guided on a short distance, stooping and crawling, until they emerged in a cellarlike room.

In that room they found Jack Ready, rolling helplessly about, a gag in his mouth, and with his hands and feet tied. Jim Haskins had bound him thus, after Ready sent out those warning whistles, and had then fled. The door was closed, but it was not locked.

Merriwell dashed through the door into the outer sunshine, as soon as Ready, released, could make them understand what had happened. The tiny door of the underground place was set in a depression of the hillside, and was so grown with grass and bushes that it could not be observed a dozen feet away.

Merriwell leaped to the top of the low eminence and looked all about. Jim Haskins was not to be seen. He knew all the hiding-places of the neighborhood, and he had been given ample time in which to escape.

"Well," thought Merriwell, as he slowly returned to the cavern, "after all, Ready's safe, and that's the most important consideration. But he can thank my 'mascot' football for his safe delivery—since that was what pointed out the path for us to follow more than everything else combined. I wouldn't sell that football for a fortune!"

THE END.

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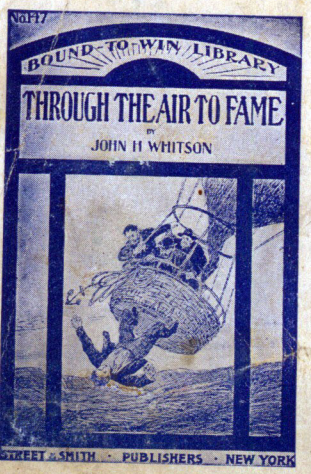

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